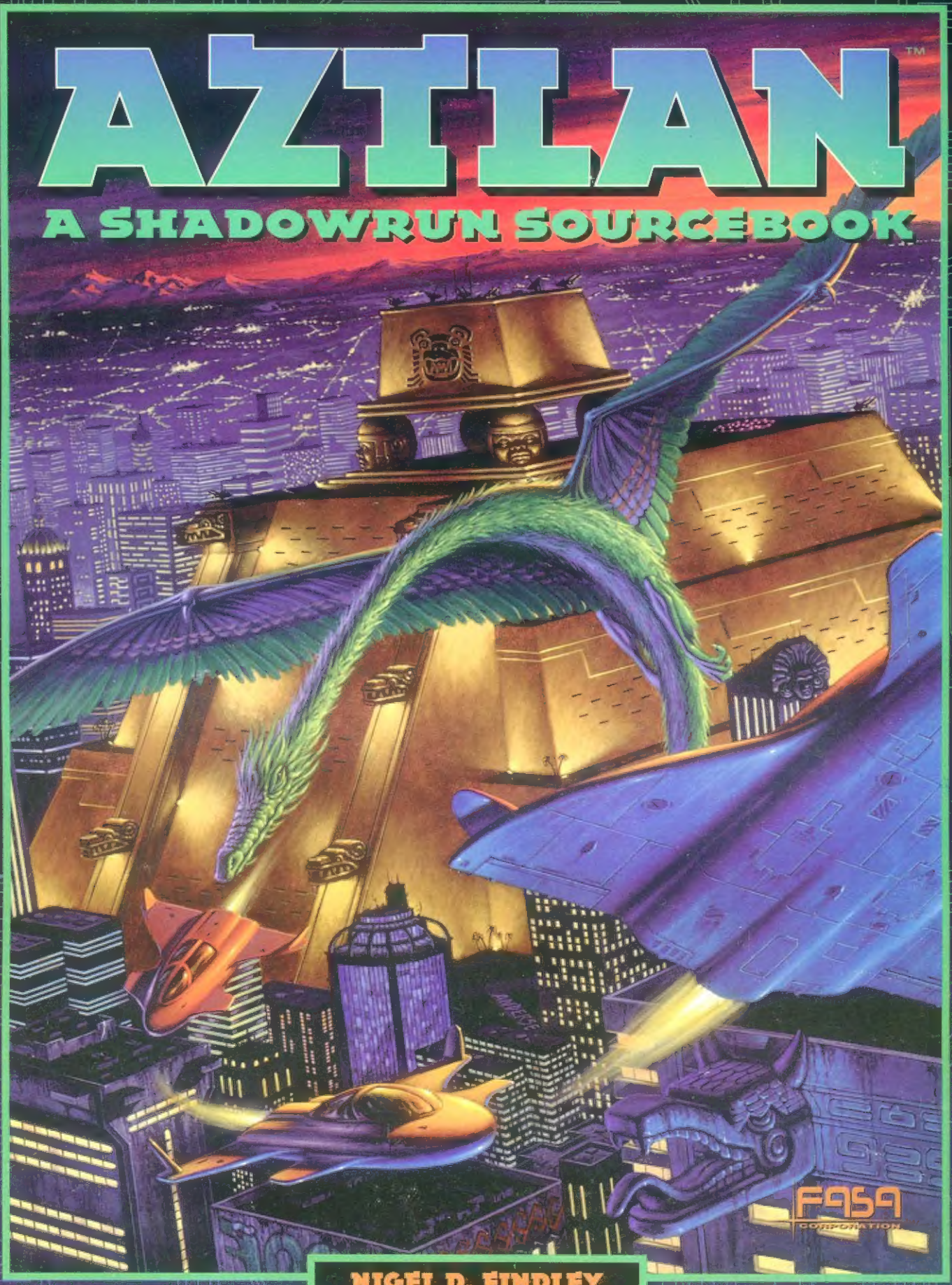
SHADOWRUN 7213

AZTLAN™

A SHADOWRUN SOURCEBOOK



FASA CORPORATION

NIGEL D. FINDLEY

DEDICATED

TO THE MEMORY OF

NIGEL D. FINDLEY

JULY 22, 1959 – FEBRUARY 19, 1995

AZTLAN™

FASA CORPORATION

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 6
INSIDE THE BIG A 9
THE CIVIL WAR 14
The Road Inland 15
The Sweep of History 16
Going Astray 19
Surprise Meeting 20
Interview with the Serpent 21
Return 27
Introductory Brief: Operation Libertad 28
Spheres of Operation 28
HISTORY 31
Our Glorious Heritage 32
The Colonial Invasion 34
The Revolution 35
Empire and Republic 35
The Mexican-American War 35
Juárez and Maximilian 35
Díaz, Zapata, and Villa 35
The New Revolution 35
The Century Turns 36
Chaos and Renaissance 36
Era of Expansion 39
Tactical Brief: Ensenada and Veracruz 42
Overview 43
The Veracruz Settlement 47
AZTECHNOLOGY 49
History 51
Cartels 51
ORO and Technopiracy 52
Formation of Aztechnology 53
Corporate Conflict 54
Aztechnology and the Aztlan Government 55
Techniques of Control 56
Corporate Structure 58
Major Divisions 58
Major Wholly Owned Subsidaries 58
Ownership 59
Management Structure 60
Business Practices 69
Key Industry Segments 69
Expansion/Acquisition and Competitive Practices 70
Intercorporate Relationships 71
Recruiting 72
Aztechnology Corporate Security 73
Magical Security 73
Matrix Security 74
Physical Security 75
Corporate and National Military 76
Equipment 76
Major Bases 76
Organization 76

Military Intelligence 78
Warriors 79
RELIGION AND MAGIC 83
Deities 84
Temples 85
The Priesthood 86
The Emperor 86
Rank-and-File Clergy 87
Forms of Worship 88
Petitioning the Deities 89
Sacrifices 90
Belief in Demons 92
Aztlan and the Catholic Church 94
The New Society of Jesus 95
Aztlan Magic 97
Aztlan Totems 97
Blood Magic 98
Foveae 102
FAST FACTS 106
Borders 106
The Panama Canal 107
From One Ocean to Another 107
Elevators in the Water 107
History of the Canal 108

CONTENTS

Population and Demographics 111
Urban/Rural Population Breakdown 111
Cultural Groups 111
Non-(Meta)Human Sentients 112
Climate 113
Temperature 113
Precipitation 113
Topography 114
GETTING IN 118
Brief 118
Introduction 118
Organization 118
Conventional Channels 119
Immigration Datawork 119
Travel by Air 121
Travel by Land 125
Travel by Sea 126
Analysis 126
Extraordinary Channels 126
Air Insertion 126
Cross-Country Insertion 128
Sea Insertion 130
Insertion Via the Yucatán 131
Analysis and Recommendation 133
LIVING IN AZTLAN 136
Life on the Streets 136
Corporators 136
Burakumin 137
Peasants 137
Shadowrunners 138
Economy 139
Currency 139
Imports and Exports 140
The Stock Market 141
Price Differentials 142
Laws, Crime and Punishment 143
Weapons 143
Chips and Other Brain-Benders 144
Cyberware 144
Cyberdecks 144
Government and Politics 146
Government Structure 146
Elections 148
National Military 149
Language 150
Mesoamerind Languages and Groups 150
TENOCHTITLÁN
Vital Statistics 154
Government 154
Precincts 154
Getting around Tenochtitlán 156
By Car 156
By Bus 156
By Monorail 157
By Short-Hop (Mariposa) 157
Tenochtitlán Survival Guide 158
Street Scene 158
Fashion 160
Architecture 161
Communications 162
Emergency Services 162
Social Services 162
Entertainment 163
Professional Sports 164
Organized Crime 166
Places of Interest 166
Hotels 167
Restaurants and Bars 168
Nightclubs 169
Aztechnology Pyramid (Corporate Headquarters) 170
Temples 170
Miscellaneous Locations 171
GAME INFORMATION 174
Aztlaner Magic 174
Iguana 174
Jaguar 174
Plumed Serpent 174
Puma 174
Blood Magic 174
Blood Spirits 176
Temples and Background Count 176
Aztechnology Corporate Security Personnel 177
Border Agent 177
Border Agent Combat Shaman 177
Standard Security Guard 177
Leopard Guard 177
Jaguar Guard 177
MediCarro 177
Response Time 177
New Equipment 178
Macauitl (Ceremonial Sword) 178
Relámpago 120mm Railgun 178
Halcón Ground-Attack Aircraft 178
Luftschiffbau Zeppelin LZ-2051-C 179
Lobo Medium Scout LAV 179
Tiburón Patol Boat 179
Liebre Surveillance/Pursuit RPV 179
Effects of Life in Tenochtitlán 180
Decreased Tolerance 180
Increased Drain 180
Air Pollution 180
Acid Rain 180

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Aztlan, a nation of contrasts: staggering wealth and crushing poverty, sophisticated technology and rampant superstition, magic and mayhem.

The **Aztlan** sourcebook is a supplement to the **Shadowrun** game system. This sourcebook offers gamemasters and players detailed information about the mysterious nation of Aztlan and the corporation that controls the nation—Aztechnology. Aztlan will provide gamemasters with enough basic information to create adventures and campaigns in that nation using the potential adventure hooks and "story starters" scattered throughout the text. Players will find a wealth of facts, rumors, advice, and warnings that they can use to arm their characters with the knowledge they need to survive runs in Aztlan.

Like previous Shadowrun sourcebooks, the Aztlan sourcebook is formatted as an electronic document from that fictional world. Most of the facts and figures contained in it are reliable, but previous readers have added their own comments, opinions, corrections, misunderstandings, allegations, innuendo, and even outright lies to the text. Because this "black" information comes from characters within the game universe, players cannot safely assume that these comments are truthful, accurate, considered, or well thought out (though they may be all those things). The gamemaster decides what is fact, fancy, or fallacy in his or her game. The player characters can only determine these distinctions by digging, probably deeper than they would like.

The **Aztlan** sourcebook includes a description of Tenochtitlán (formerly Mexico City) and also provides new rules for environmental conditions, equipment, and types of magic unique to Aztlan. **Aztlan** is for use with the **Shadowrun, Second Edition,** rules. This book also draws on information presented in the **Shadowrun** sourcebooks **Grimoire, Second Edition; Corporate Shadowfiles; Denver;** and **The Neo-Anarchist's Guide to Real Life.**

WELCOME TO SHADOWLAND

"I HAVE TAKEN ALL KNOWLEDGE TO BE MY PROVINCE."
—FRANCIS BACON, 1592

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ASCENDING

SPRING 2056 ISSUE

THE DATAMAG FOR THE UPWARDLY MOBILE

THE WAY TO KNOW WHICH WAY TO GO

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE: Corporate Styles in the Big Three [You Know Their Names]

DOWNLOADING COMPLETE TEXT FILES...

DOWNLOADING IMAGE FILES...

INSIDE THE BIG A

Download All? [Y/n]> **Y**
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—Reprinted from *Ascending: The DataMag for the Upwardly Mobile*, Spring 2050

In today's world of high tech and higher expectations, even top executives cannot win the Big Prize just by getting the job done. To get the gold ring, you've got to do the job *in style*. This axiom holds as true for negotiating a social merger over a pint of pure-brewed ale at Noggins Brew Pub as it does for facing down a hostile board of directors. Everything about today's up-and-comers has to convey a personal style—the right style.

Everything, includi**BREAK**\\

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GRUENSTEIN '95

[Welcome to the Secret TreeHouse!!!]

>>>>>(First things first. Apologies for what probably feels like a fraggin' ridiculous level of security. Purposefully corrupted files, cross-linking the Aztechnology paydata with some obsolete Neo-A babble, then going the entire palimpsest route and concealing one message within another. What's the fragging point, huh? Shadowland didn't bother to go to these paranoid lengths when we busted the scoop about the two Tirs, or even about the megacorps. Those boys have finally lost it, you say, they've finally stepped over the edge to waltz with their invisible partners

Well, I hate to disabuse you of your naiveté, but chummer the tap-dancing's necessary. In all the time I've been with the Shadowland organization (and I use that word in its most ironic sense), we've had maybe half a dozen major penetrations of security—trashed files, trashed hardware, trashed personnel. All but one (maybe two—I don't want to hash out the Grodin's Tavern explosion again) were linked somehow to Aztlan or Aztechnology. Seems the Azzies are even more militant than the TT dandelion-eaters when it comes to keeping their deep-darks deep and dark

Now, we all know the important role Shadowland plays in getting the clean scoop out where folks can see it. Despite that, a few people in S-land "management" argued that we should just back way the frag off from the whole Azzie thing. Sure, the paydata we'd got our mitts on was important ... but important enough to put the whole Shadowland system at risk? Some said no; I said yes

I won

But only after I agreed to get as hard-hooped about security as I could, hence the palimpsest. Terminate explanation mode.

Much of what you're about to scan comes to us from a single source, despite the way it looks. The way we figure, our secret benefactor is associated with Aztechnology's intelligence apparatus. (Has to be, to have gotten his/her/its (?) hands on some of this stuff.) Assuming the paydata's for real, the Azzie spooks seem to have penetrated a drekload of places and collected plenty that they shouldn't have. Our benefactor—we're calling him Espectro (Ghost) around the "offices"—swiped this material and cross-posted it to us at Shadowland. As for the reason why, we'd guess he's a closet sympathizer with the Yucatán rebels, and hopes to do them good by getting some truth about Aztlan out into the larger world. (The fact that Espectro leads off his contribution with considerable data on the Yucatán civil war is probably a good gauge of his motives. Which reminds me—we've posted this info in the order it came to us, assuming that Espectro put the most important stuff first. We've added other data to his post to repair what we saw as holes in the overall picture.) So here it is, and god help Espectro, whoever and wherever he may be. If any of this is the real gen, he's one brave soul

A word on translations. Some of the material we got from chummer Espectro was in Aztlaner Spanish (that is, Spanish with a twist). We ran it through a couple of translator programs (details available on request) and compared the results, picking the one that seemed to make most sense. Be warned, however; some terms are untranslatable for one reason or another. We've dropped in our best reasonable deductions as to meaning based on context, formatted like this: (untranslatable—"guess/deduction?")—but don't bet your life on them. For the techno-addicted among us, we've also quoted which translation program we used, so you can go back and check the algorithms and look-up tables involved. (Sure beats having a real life, doesn't it?))<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:10:31/5-1-56)

>>>>>(Am I the only one who feels the least bit hinky about this? This is the fragging Azzles we're talking about here ...)<<<<<

—Monty (04:15:06/5-2-56)

>>>>>(You think this might be disinformation? Well, the thought had crossed my mind. What better way to frag us up than to "leak" paydata that's pure buildrek? Then just sit back and watch us kill ourselves by trusting it ...

Query: Who the frag is this Espectro? "Some guy in Azzie Intel with warm cozies for a bunch of revolutionaries" doesn't quite cut it for me. Before we can evaluate the data, we have to evaluate the source, neh? So can we narrow it down a little?)<<<<<

—Doc (09:13:13/5-2-56)

>>>>>(Here's my scan, kotz and kotchkas. This drek ain't worth the digital media it's stored on. And here's why. Check the origins of some of the files. Internal memos from Ares Arms. Planning documents from UCAS Consular Operations. Merc briefings from the Yucatan rebels. And more drek like that. I mean, who do they think they're foolin'? Nobody's that deep into so many outfits. Not even Aztechnology/Aztlan. Much easier to make up convincing lies. This whole thing's a scam. Got to be.)<<<<<

—Oshkosh (16:02:23/5-3-56)

>>>>>(Looks like Oshkosh has just rediscovered Occam's Razor. Normally I'd agree with him, but the file header for the ConsOps file is legitimate. I don't have enough access anymore to check if it's a current case file, but I can say the syntax in the file identifier is right. It could be a real ConsOps document. And that fact makes me less inclined to reach for Occam's Razor on this one.

Hey, chummers: any Ares corp-boys out there who can tell us if the Ares file format's right too? If it is, I'd be much more likely to buy into the whole thing.)<<<<<

—Jason (02:17:11/5-4-56)

>>>>>(I know you're all gonna rank on me for this, but it's gotta be said. I know we only get to keep breathing because we suspect that everything we see is a lie and no one ever tells us the straight gen, but gimme a break here. I know people personally (some of whom post on this board) who TELL THE TRUTH! In fact, if this guy is inside and looking to get the word out, for whatever reason, WHY WOULD HE LIE? In fact, if this is some elaborate hoax, can't we assume that the author's gonna slip up somewhere and that we'll see it for the fake it is? Geez—this is a lotta info to doubt all at once. If I'm gonna eat all the salt you guys suggest, I'll need to stock up on those electrolyte-replacing thirst quenchers that athletes were so hot on last century—and I don't even like the way they taste!)<<<<<

—Plaintive in Poughkeepsie (14:45:08/5-4-56)

>>>>>(Gee—I know Plaintive, and she's survived long enough to know what she's talking about. Maybe we should listen to the old crone. And then, maybe not.)<<<<<

—Doc (14:55:14/5-4-56)

>>>>>(As usual, this stuff assumes a lot of prior knowledge many of you street-scabs probably aren't going to have. (You know the old joke: "What's long and hard on a shadowrunner?" Answer: "Third grade." Ga-harf ga-harf.) So the Good Captain asked me to cop some basic background from a bunch of low-level sources to update you slots who think Aztlan's somewhere down near Tierra del Fuego. Catch ya later.)<<<<<

—W-boy (09:08:25/5-4-56)

>>>>>(Hey, Wiener-boy, you come down my part of town I'll show you what I've got that's long and hard. It'll make your eyes bug out. (Hydrostatic shock does that sometimes, depends on where the bullet hits.))<<<<<

—Long Rifle (11:28:15/5-4-56)

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Good evening.

:::::[HECATE] *****IDENT FAILURE—<UNTRANSLATABLE>*****

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Please use common English. My interface includes a real-time language translation and I'm afraid it cannot handle the old tongues.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] What is the meaning of this??

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Bravo! Outfoxed by the Dark Wyrm! True deviltry!

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I was not told others would be at our meeting, dragon ...

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Nor I.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] It seems we have all fallen victim to the same ruse.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Wondrous irony, that we who prefer to be at each other's throats should be tricked into meeting after all.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] The subterfuge seemed necessary to accomplish my ends.

:::::[HECATE] Tell me your reason for this <UNTRANSLATABLE> or I will leave.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I want all of you to read something the humans call a compilation of files. This particular collection is about Aztlan.

:::::>JUNGLE CAT SPITS

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Is the Watcher attending to this?

:::::[UMSONDO] I am here.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] And giving away nothing, as usual. In your honor I shall eschew any further humor or wit. >THE LAUGH-[illegible]

:::::[WORDSMYTH] What makes you think this compilation contains anything we don't already know?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Oh, I suspect he knows you know what we're going to see. He just doesn't think you've thought about what you know we'll see.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Ah, so the dragon knows you well, "Wordsmyth."

:::::[WORDSMYTH] And what could have been the reason he chose to bring you here, "Lady of the Court?"

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Know three things, my friends. First: I am, by virtue of a friend of mine, your technological master here, in a manner of speaking—not that I wish to overstress this. Any of you are free to leave whenever you wish, but given the importance of what we are here to consider it may be slightly difficult for you to leave before we have exhausted the possibilities for discussion.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] A sly wyrm, isn't he? Well, I will not try to slip his bonds, if such they are. This may be amusing for a time. <chuckle>

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Second, each of you is here because of who you are and in most cases who you represent, be it a country or other interests.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] ELVIS VOICE——> Uh, thank you very much.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Also courtesy of my technologically gifted friend, you checked your personal animosities at the—what is the word—"virtual gateway" when you entered.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ah! Is Brightlight among us then?

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I think not. He has better taste than to cast his gifts carelessly at the feet of beasts. He has not come through the "virtual gateway" spoken of.

:::::[HECATE] Leave him be. He has earned his arrogance. You have not.

:::::>THE LAUGHING MAN TIPS HIS HAT TO HECATE

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Must I be forever compelled to associate with juveniles?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Put aside your ill will. I will enforce civility between you if I absolutely must. It would be better if we behave like reasonable creatures wishing to survive and pursue our interests and pleasures. Could we please agree to this?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Who could disagree with such sweet reason?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] <Sigh> "What does a ten-thousand-year-old dragon do?"

:::::[HECATE] [redacted]

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] The Wordsmyth cracks a joke! Surely it is the Sixth World!

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] I don't understand.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] He is paraphrasing an old joke about gorillas.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] I don't know that one.

:::::[HECATE] ANYTHING HE WANTS!

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Answer——>ANYTHING HE WANTS.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Ah.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I will tell you the third thing you must know when we finish reading this.

:::::[WORDSMTYH] Wonderful.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I'll bet I know what it is!

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You will all receive the complete text of this "Aztlan" document simultaneously in real time. Comment freely on anything that strikes a chord. You may also find it illuminating to discuss what you read among yourselves.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Dun ... Big 'D', I have better things to do with my time.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I doubt it, Lady. I am confident you will agree with me when you read this. More important, I believe you will want to hear what the others have to say.

:::::[HECATE] I will stay.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] As will I, for now.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Count me in!

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] If I may learn anything new about our ancient foe, then I will remain.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I suppose I must stay, too.

:::::[UMSONDO] I remain and observe.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Then we shall begin.

>>>>CODE: FILE EXECUTE—AZTLAN

BEGIN? [Y/N]> Y

THE CIVIL WAR

>>>>>(When we at Shadowland got this motherfragging HUGE post on all the down-and-dirty about Aztlan, this news article was first. After reading it, we understood why. There's bad trouble going on down south, and the brave folks doing something about it haven't been able to get out their side of the story.

Until now. With Espectro's help, readers of this BBS get a glimpse of the clean scan on the "localized insurgency" in the Yucatán. Anybody planning on taking a run for either side—or any run that might be remotely connected to either side (which covers a lot of ground, my friends)—now has an idea of what's really going down. Know the truth, boys and girls, for it surely will make you free (or at least more careful).

The following is a text file apparently snatched from the editing/composition computer system at *newsFAXday* out of Atlanta. I don't know how Espectro managed to scam it, but he's given us the author's original text of a feature piece on the Yucatán squabble, plus the changes the editor made on the draft. The deleted material—drek the editor yarded out—is displayed in ~~strikethrough text~~. Material the editor added to the draft is displayed in **boldface type.** Got it? Good.

Oh, yeah—for those few of you who keep track, the journalist is Nicola Forberger. Her editor in Atlanta is Diana Mlodzik.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:00:10/5-1-56)

BEECHING

Behind me, toward the sea, the sky was a perfect, infinite tropical blue. Ahead of me, through the windshield of the rented Hummer, the sky reminded me of an artist's impression of Hell.

The smoke rose in thin, twisted columns. Fifty meters above the treetops it spread out into a thin ceiling, a diaphanous veil covering half the sky. Ahead, I could see the margin of the shadow where the smoke attenuated the sunlight. As I followed the road inland and passed under the smoke-curtain, the sun turned red as its light refracted through the particulates. I powered up the windows of the Hummer. Too late—the harsh burning smell was already catching in my throat.

No, this wasn't the ~~civil war~~ **rebel uprising**, not yet. The "traditionals" of the Yucatán, the natives who'd lived here since time immemorial, were burning the underbrush near the road to revitalize the soil. Few people realize it, but the Yucatán peninsula is an unbroken shield of limestone covered by shallow, barely fertile soil. That's why the trees of the Yucatán jungles don't soar to the same heights as those in the Amazon rain forest—they can't sink their roots deeply enough before hitting bedrock.

So thin is the soil that cultivation quickly drains it of its life-giving nutrients. The traditionals—some might call them "peasants," but not to their faces!—must burn the growth to return nitrogen to the soil, so that they can continue eking out their precarious living.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Because their vile masters pervert their magics so they cannot use it to heal the land. Paejaki.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Watch your language, there are children present. They might not understand what you mean.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Oh, be quiet.

:::::[UMSONDO] Cat is not so ill-advised to speak. Barrenness is fertility. Destruction sows the seeds of vile growth. Why else are we here to speak?

The Road Inland

My journey started from the city of Progreso, on the northern coast of the Yucatán peninsula. Once a small fishing port, it's now a burgeoning city with a major military base nearby.

>>>>>(Got it backwards, my girl. It's a military base that just so happens to have a city near it (convenient for supplies and such).)<<<<<

—Tituba (12:02:01/5-8-56)

APCs and light tanks rumble through the streets. Helicopter gunships practice their dance of death in the skies overhead. Occasionally, the tortured howl of high-output turbines from the fenced-off security compound hints at the presence of LAVs.

>>>>>(LAVs? You're farcing me. The Yucatán's fragging jungle, isn't it? Wouldn't catch this gal driving her t-bird into no fragging jungle.)<<<<<

—Rhombus (22:49:04/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Like the journalist said, Rhombus: stop thinking Amazon rain forest. This is much smaller tubers. Trees get to maybe 30 meters tall, max, and their roots don't go deep. If you don't care about your paint job, you can just power through in a LAV with enough jam. (And if there's one thing the Azzie Lobo class of LAVs have, it's jam.))<<<<<

—Arctic White (23.05.31/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Oh, yeah, smooth move. Go roaring through the jungle in your t-bird. Everyone within 50 klicks can hear you coming and set up a nice reception for you. Here's one I've seen the rebs use over and over. The Yucatán features a lot of sinkholes in the limestone—the locals call them *cenotes*. Your average t-bird pilot can't see one until he's roaring right over it.

Too bad if there happens to be a rebel heavy-weapons team hunkered down in the bottom of the cenote, just waiting to put a spread of rockets under the LAV's skirts. Not much armor on the underside, right? And even if the missiles don't punch through into the crew compartment, they still tear the holy living drek out of the vectored-thrust gear. Bang, no lift. With no lift, a LAV flies about as well as a brick.

And as far as the rebels are concerned, a crippled Lobo is as good as a kill.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (09:16:22/5-12-56)

>>>>>(I said you could do it. I didn't say it was smart.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (00:15:37/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Why do I have to keep saying this??? Is everyone completely brain-fragged??? FLY YOUR FRAGGIN' LAV! It's a Low-Altitude Vehicle, not a fraggin' BUS.)<<<<<

—Firelight (20:18:13/5-16-56)

The high-tech ziggurat of the military base's phased-array radar looms against the jungle skyline, gleaming like an enormous jewel in the morning sun. As I stare in unabashed wonder, something that looks like a small comet burns across the front of the array: one of the fire elementals that protects the strategically vital site. I can't see the other defenses that guard the radar installation, of course: ~~the invisible lobes of electromagnetic energy extending from the fire track-and-antimissile sites flanking the base, the motion detectors and pressure sensors, the armed guards, the prowling paranimals~~.

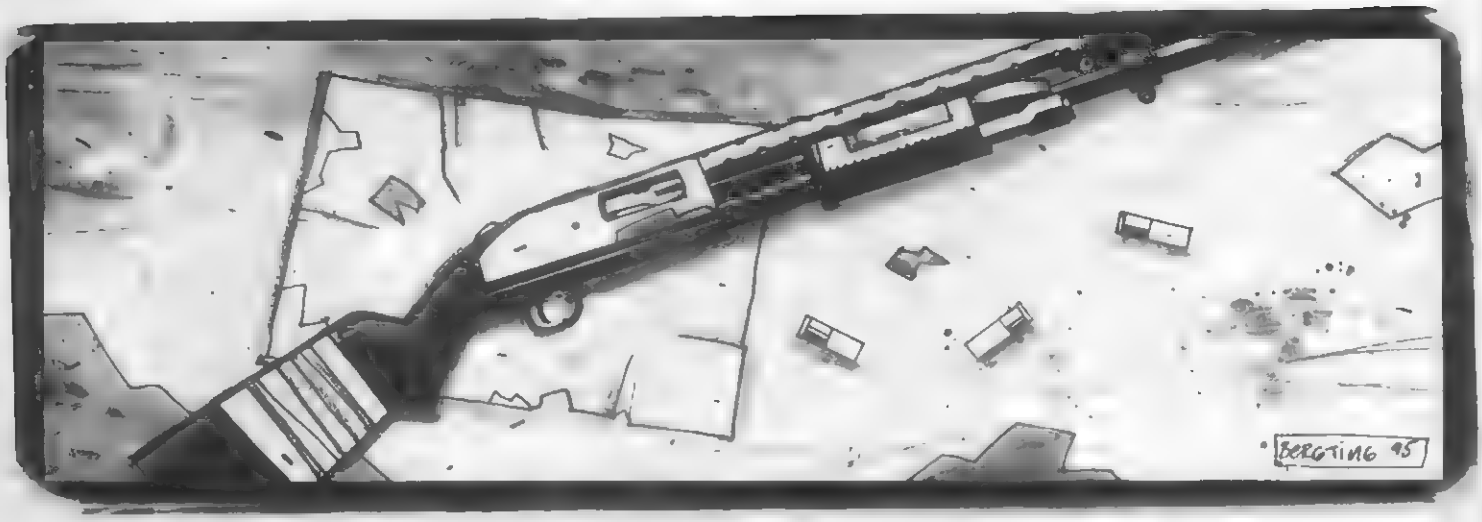
>>>>>(Oops, guess that's getting a little specific for the Azzie censors.)<<<<<

—Tilde (14:05.01/5-9-56)

>>>>>(The Azzie censors never saw this stuff, slot. The fragging newsfax editor's axing the good stuff.)<<<<<

—London (03:05:16/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Okay, let's get it out in the open right here and now. NewsFAXday is part of a news/entertainment chain based in Atlanta, owned by Xpress Communications Corporation. Three



guesses as to what megacorp owns XCC, lock stock and barrel .. and the first two guesses don't count.)<<<<<

—Media Watcher (08:14:31/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Aztechnology. Honto?)<<<<<

—Jeni Fire (15:06:00/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Right in one, Jeni. (Nobody's surprised, are they?) Bottom line: you ain't gonna see nothing disparaging about Aztechnology, or anything the corp might consider sensitive, in any XCC publication ... and that includes newsFAXday, of course. (I'm honestly surprised the editor let the comment on LAVs run.)

Now before anyone gets up in fragging arms, take note: this ain't nothing new. This kind of crap dates back to before the start of the last century. (I seem to remember a pointed old quote about freedom of the press belonging to those who own one.) Anyway, here's a great case in point from the 1970s/1980s. One of the major TV networks back then—NBC, I think, but don't quote (or sue) me—never showed a sympathetic portrayal of protestors against nuke power. Why? Because the network belonged to GE, a proto-megacorp, which just so happened to manufacture and market nuclear reactors

Plus ça change, neh?)<<<<<

—Media Watcher (09:23:15/5-12-56)

Troops fill the city streets, mostly armed patrols and uniformed soldiers free to enjoy Progreso in their off-duty hours. Everywhere I look, I see tan uniforms. It's difficult for a civilian to distinguish between members of Aztechnology Corporate Security and soldiers in the Aztlan Armed Forces. It takes me a few minutes to note the major difference: the stylized *sarape* (broad scarf) that distinguishes the ACS uniform.

>>>>>(They don't look different because they aren't different Where the ACS ends and the AAF begins (or vice versa) is a matter of opinion.)<<<<<

—Zoltrix (22:13:06/5-9-56)

I could spend days absorbing the fascinating ambiance of the new, armed Progreso. But this town isn't my destination. Clutching my datapad with its encrypted maps and files and making sure I've got my credstick, I head for my waiting Hummer. For a moment, I start second-guessing my decision to travel unarmed. Even a light pistol would feel reassuring. But then I see the armaments carried by the tan-clad military and security personnel. The off-duty soldiers are armed with nothing lighter than a machine pistol or chopped-down SMG. And members of the patrols—angular and alien in their military-grade armor—seem to consider a light machine gun a suitable personal weapon. Suddenly, a personal handgun seems irrelevant.

The engine of the Hummer lights immediately. The vehicle jerks embarrassingly on to the road as I try to get used to the heavy clutch, and I head south on Autoroute 261. Then I turn eastward on the secondary road that runs through Motul, Temax, and Tizimín—somehow evocative names, all—toward the Caribbean Sea. Destination: the village of Kantunilkin, some 70 kilometers inland from Cancún. My goal: a meeting with one of the senior officers among the ~~freedom-fighters~~ **rebels**.

The Sweep of History

The Yucatán uprising—or "rebellion," depending on your personal tastes—is not an isolated historical event, though many try to describe it as one. In many ways, it's just the latest outbreak of a conflict that has simmered for decades, perhaps centuries. In the early 1990s, an uprising in the state of Chiapas, 300 kilometers southwest of the current zone of conflict, brought to popular attention the long-ignored complaints of the traditionals (those of Mesoamerind blood) and the *mestizos* (those of mixed Spanish and Mesoamerind descent).

These tensions burst forth with renewed violence at the turn of the century. In addition to the familiar protests, demonstrations, riots, and low-level sabotage, the dawn of the 21st century saw a wave of assassinations throughout southeastern Mexico. The governors of three states—Chiapas, Campeche, and Quintana Roo—all died within two weeks. The governor of the *Distrito Federal* (the Federal District, the seat of the federal gov-

ernment in Mexico City) barely escaped with his life when a car bomb exploded outside his office during the same period.

>>>>>(The Mesoamerind rebels didn't try to off the Distrito Federal governor, though he's a real nasty joker, name of Francisco del Grande. The reborn Medellín drug cartel was behind that job. Using some of the provisions of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), the U.S. had been grinding Mexico over "going soft" on drug shipments that over flew Mexican territory or left from Mexican turf. President Miguel Ávila folded under pressure and started clamping down on the drug traffic.

Ávila—who happened to be scheduled for a breakfast meeting with del Grande the morning of the Big Kaboom (Ávila was late; wonder if he knew anything ...)—was the target of the car bomb. For political reasons, it was much better all around to lay the incident at the door of the Mesoamerind rebels.)<<<<<

—Sangre (11:10:05/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Concur. The rebels didn't get into car bombs until later, when they got a "technological infusion" from other sources. At the time, they were more likely to go with a shot from a cheap handgun or a hunting rifle.)<<<<<

—Pedro (16:55:07/5-14-56)

A bloody government clampdown in 2002 seemed to put an end to the problem. More than two dozen rebel leaders were captured or shot while resisting arrest. But the tensions that had caused the earlier uprisings remained beneath the surface, building in intensity and festering in the darkness of underground "freedom" organizations.

>>>>>(Ooooh ... is that what they call "yellow journalism?" Or "purple prose?")<<<<<

—Bung (08:07:50/5-10-56)

In 2010, those tensions burst forth once more with renewed intensity. This time the uprising centered on the states of Campeche and Yucatán, though echoes of answering violence followed in Chiapas and even in the neighboring state of Tabasco. The very nature of the uprising was different this time. In the earlier conflicts, the offices of local governments had been taken over or besieged by marginally organized "civilian militias" of farmers and ranchers and truckers, armed with little more than machetes, hunting rifles, rusting shotguns and righteous anger. The state governors had been assassinated by civilians—people who'd just gone out and done it, without much in the way of planning or support. (Two of the three assassins of 2001 were captured and interrogated. The government grudgingly had to admit that they were working alone—they were simply men with a grudge and a gun.)

The 2010 uprising was much better organized. Though the "front-line soldiers" were still a civilian militia, this time they coordinated their actions to a surprising degree, almost as if they had some kind of central command structure. Armament and logistics also improved this time around. Though the majority of the "soldiers" were still armed with archaic hunting rifles, the Mexican federal government was disturbed to see the emergence of *"Especial"* units armed with more sophisticated weapons.

>>>>>(My father had the dubious honor of serving in the Mexican army during this period. In late 2010, his unit was traveling the main highway that connected Mérida and Cancún on the Yucatán peninsula. Near Chichén Itzá, they drove into a rebel ambush. Jury-rigged nail strips had been placed across the road to shred the tires of their Humvees. My father's comrades knew they would be fired upon the moment they left the protection of their vehicles to remove the nail strips. Yet they were confident that any casualties they took would be light. After all, they were wearing the best military body armor that the technology of 2010 could provide, so they expected rounds from ancient hunting rifles to do little more than make dents. In perfect order, my father's comrades sprinted from their vehicles and began clearing the obstruction. At that point the rebel Especial unit dug in among the trees flanking the road opened fire. Not with ancient hunting rifles—with military-specification, crew-served machine guns. With rocket launchers. With man-portable miniguns. Within the first 20 seconds, my father's unit took 80 percent casualties, and he suffered a wound that cost him his right arm.)<<<<<

—Mujeres (10:25:21/5-12-56)

>>>>>(You'd think the Mexicans would have learned from the Mohawk situation up in Oka ten years earlier. "Native" doesn't mean "primitive." Not when anyone with the bucks can connect with an international terrorist group and buy all the mil-spec hardware they need to ruin the day for a whole lot of soldiers.)<<<<<

—Jimjim (04:56:29/5-13-56)

In retrospect, it seems obvious that the traditionals of the Yucatán region were receiving outside support—from other nations, perhaps, or from the drug cartels of Colombia and Ecuador.

>>>>>(Mainly the latter, you ask me. The Medellín outfit was probably still a mite pissed over Ávila clamping down on their ops on Mexican turf.)<<<<<

—Lanza (13:37:09/5-10-56)

Once again, the government tried to clamp down. This time, however, they found it rough going. It was simple enough to scoop up countless civilian "soldiers," but the uprising's leaders and organizers managed to keep one long step ahead of government dragnets. In late 2010, another wave of assassinations swept the country, paralyzing state governments throughout southeastern Mexico from Acapulco to Cancún.

These assassinations also showed more sophistication and better organization as well. Sniping remained the primary method of choice, but instead of 30-year-old hunting Remingtons, the weapons were technologically advanced sniper rifles. Coordinated tactics, diversions, multiple gunmen, and well-planned escape routes quickly told the government that the conflict had changed. Within a four-month period, two dozen

government officials lost their lives. For all those crimes, only one assassin was captured, and he was quickly charged, convicted, and executed.

>>>>>(Buildrek. The government needed to prove they weren't totally tit-useless, so they scooped some poor sod up off the street. A quick kangaroo court and a firing squad, all to send a message that nobody paid attention to anyway.)<<<<<

—Sangre (11:19:12/5-12-56)

>>>>>(The rebels got into car bombs about this time; sophisticated things using military explosives, not the typical diesel-and-fertilizer drek you'd expect.)<<<<<

—Pedro (17:07:30/5-14-56)

"hard left" spin-off from the FDN, which figured the party had "sold out" its communist principles as soon as it achieved power, combined with direct action by the drug cartels to further destabilize the tottering nation. Mexico had become a powder keg waiting for a match.

That match came when the VITAS epidemic swept through the Mexican population. The disease hit the underpopulated center of the country hard, but had its greatest impact in the heart of Mexico City. By this time, Mexico City had become a sprawling megalopolis of more than 23 million souls, its population already overloading the infrastructure and severely straining the medical-delivery systems then in place. When VITAS hit, panic further degraded the effectiveness of a health-care system that already couldn't cope. By Christmas of 2010, more than 12 percent of Mexico City's vast population was dead or dying.

The rebellion wasn't the only trouble the government had to face. The governing coalition, combining the leftist *Frente Democrático Nacional* (National Democratic Front, or FDN) and the nominally Catholic *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party, or PAN), was suffering from a spate of scandals even greater than the ones that brought down the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) five years before.

>>>>>(A coalition of leftists and Catholics? Only in Mexico, I guess.)<<<<<

—Drover (04:17:06/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Hey, even socialists and Catholics can agree sometimes. In this case, they agreed that they wanted the fragging PRI out.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (19:28:57/5-11-56)

The economy took a beating as big-business interests, among the major supporters of the PRI before the last raft of scandals, withdrew their support from all government programs in an obvious attempt to oust the governing coalition which, they considered (with some degree of truth) rabidly antibusiness. Terrorist activities by a

>>>>>(That figure sounds bad enough, but the reality was worse. Many people fled from the city, carrying the virus with them, and in turn overloading the medical-delivery systems in other Mexican cities that might otherwise have been able to handle the crisis. In Mexico City, the sheer number of dead caused its own problems. Decaying bodies floated in the Canal de Chalco, lay rotting in the Avenida 5 de Mayo, filled the air with the reek of corruption, and contaminated the water supplies. More than 2.5 million people died of VITAS in Mexico City alone, and another million-plus cashed in because of cholera and other secondary infections.)<<<<<

—Staedtler (13:56:00/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Many of my older countrymen recall those days. They still refer to that period as "the Terror Time.")<<<<<

—Matador (01:51:18/5-17-56)

Attempts to limit the spread of the pandemic often did more harm than good. The panicked attempt to wipe out "foci of infection" by burning portions of the city is but one of many tragic examples. The wholesale burning of city blocks, usually in the poorer parts of town, was led by "citizens' action committees" rather than by city authorities. ~~In many cases, though, city~~

~~authorities knew the burnings would take place, and chose not to step in and prevent them.~~ Whole regions of the city went up in flames, destroying irreplaceable monuments and artwork.

>>>>>(Good fragging Christ, can you imagine it? VITAS on one side, cholera on the other, and between the two your neighbors who want to burn you and your family because one of you might be a carrier.)<<<<<

—Thoroughly Mondo Millie (15:14:20/5-10-56)

In January 2011, the inevitable occurred. The government collapsed and Mexico fell into anarchy.

>>>>>(Could that have something to do with the fact that most of the government had actually bailed out of the fragging country early in the epidemic, heading north to Atlanta and other American cities where they could get the cutting-edge medical care their countrymen would never see? Nah, of course not ...)<<<<<

—Archer (23:24:02/5-9-56)

Over the next 20 years Mexico—renamed Aztlan—recovered from the economic and social disasters of 2010–2011.

~~Under the supposedly more enlightened Aztlan government, however, the traditionals and the other Yucatán rebels still did not see the advances and benefits they'd killed and died for. The pressures that led to rebellion still bubbled beneath the surface, revealing themselves occasionally in localized—and swiftly, brutally quelled—outbursts of violence: Tizimín (2035), Celestun (2039), Xpujil (2045), and the bloody massacre outside Campeche in 2050 where ACS forces slaughtered hundreds of unarmed civilians.~~

Under the more enlightened Aztlan government, the traditionals and *mestizos* saw massive improvements in their standard of living, as well as the recognition of their distinct culture under the new constitution. Certain people, however, never satisfied with the gains they saw, willingly turned again to violence to grind more concessions out of the government. Riots burst out in Tizimín in 2035, Celestun in 2039, and Xpujil in 2045. In 2050, the Aztlan army was mobilized to defend the city of Campeche against an assault force of well-armed, foreign-backed rebels.

>>>>>(Don't you just love unbiased reportage? Cut me loose here ...)<<<<<

—Puget Deb (19:37:02/5-11-56)

>>>>>(That's an editor's job, Deb—to rein in the excesses of a rabid bleeding-heart journalist.)<<<<<

—Newt II (03:21:39/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Not exactly what I meant, as you very well know, slot.)<<<<<

—Puget Deb (19:02:09/5-12-56)

The Campeche ~~massacre~~ **assault** seemed to spark the current ~~civil war~~ **rebellion**. Military-style raids on strategic sites in the Yucatán began in early 2051, escalating in frequency and ferocity over the next four years. The level of conflict remains low as these things are generally measured, rarely escalating above low-intensity guerrilla warfare.

And I'm driving in my rented Hummer straight into this theatre of conflict.

Going Astray

My route eastward leads me through countless villages too small to appear on my digital map. As I drive into the heart of the Yucatán, I feel as though I'm driving backward in time. By the time I reach the town of Temax, I've left the 21st century behind. If the road ever had GridGuide™ hardware installed, it has long since failed through lack of maintenance. There are no street lights, no distance or route markers. Possibly for the first time in my life, I'm outside cellular coverage; my phone and the cellular packet modem in my datapad are useless hunks of technological detritus.

>>>>>(Huh? She doesn't carry a satellite telephone?? What's going on here??)<<<<<

—J-School Doctor (10:20:34/5-10-56)

An hour east of Temax, I pull over into a Pemex service station—a decaying, tumble-down facility that reminds me of a set from a historical trid drama. The owner/operator, when he finally deigns to come out and serve me, doesn't speak English, and my Spanish is hardly up to the task of specifying the grade of methanol the Hummer needs. Finally I get the message across and he starts to fill the tank. As he does, his family—a dark-skinned, black-haired woman and three tiny children all under the age of four—watches me from the shade of the office with unabashed curiosity. Something about their steady gaze makes me uncomfortable. I'm glad to be rolling again.

>>>>>(She's going deep into Aztlan and doesn't speak Spanish???)<<<<<

—J-School Doctor (10:21.58/5-10-56)

>>>>>(If you'd read a little more carefully, J, you might have spotted a more logical conclusion; she knows enough Spanish to get by OK in the "civilized" places she mostly frequents, but doesn't happen to know the precise words for a certain kind of fuel (Paranoids ...))<<<<<

—Meistersinger (10:36:59/5-10-56)

The tiny villages I pass seem to have been uprooted from a century or more in the past. A dozen or so small, ramshackle buildings—huts, almost—flank the road. No village has anything so sophisticated as a stoplight, or even a stop sign. The highway runs right through the middle of each village; chickens peck at the dusty road surface. Twenty meters before each village, however, I run into a series of large speed bumps set across the road

to slow down the traffic. The first time I see these speed bumps, I drop down to a walking pace to save the Hummer's suspension. As I do, children materialize out of the trees beside the road, running up to the side of my car, trying to sell me fruit. At first I think it's charming. Then I see the sullen-eyed men standing in the shade of the trees, many of them carrying machetes. They're glaring at my Hummer, and the charm vanishes. From then on, I take the speed bumps faster than a man can run.

Some of the figures watching me from the roadside are traditionals, I can see that. Small and stocky, all of them, with skin the color of freshly cured leather. Piercing eyes, and something distinctive about the shape of the skull. It's impossible to mistake them for *mestizos*, Aztlaners of Spanish descent.

It's midafternoon by the time I reach Tizimín. Though I'm deep in contested territory, I have yet to see any trace of military action—troops, fighting vehicles, or battle damage.

>>>>>(That's what "low-intensity warfare" means, you dork. What the frag were you expecting, huge killing zones littered with burned-out tanks, crisscrossed with control wires from guided missiles? Gimme a break!)<<<<<

—Tozer (16:19:09/5-12-56)

I pull over onto the apron of a disreputable-looking, truck stop-style coffee shop on the outskirts of town. As I step out of the air-conditioned Hummer, the heat and humidity hit me with almost physical impact. I hurry into the shade of the ramshackle building and head inside for "supplies"—bottled water, fruit juice, and maybe a beer for the road. The proprietor, a big-boned Latin, greets me with a chipped smile and wishes me good day in slow, simplified Spanish. He nods as I struggle to place my order.

Then he looks up, over my shoulder. And his dark eyes widen in alarm.

Instinctively, I spin on my heel to see who or what is behind me. Nothing. Puzzled, I turn back ... just in time to see the little gun in the proprietor's hand belch a spray of gas into my face. Instantly I'm blind. Then unconsciousness breaks over me like a black wave.

Surprise Meeting

Consciousness returns with startling suddenness, as if at the flick of a switch. I'm lying on a camp-style cot in a darkened room. I open my eyes, but even the dim lighting is too bright. I whimper with the pain of it.

"Relax, Señorita Forberger," a voice tells me from near at hand—a voice as deep and smooth as velvet, as midnight.

I try to sit up, but my body is still too weak. "Where the frag am I?" I ask.

A chuckle from that impossibly well-modulated voice. I feel it in the pit of my stomach, a warm sensation. "Safe," the voice tells me. For the first time, I realize it has no accent—*none*. It sounds like the perfect idealization of English.

"But where?" I demand, a little plaintively.

"There is no need for you to know that precisely," the voice says coolly. Then another chuckle. "You are where you intended to be, but by another route."

Again I try to sit up. This time I manage. I force my watering eyes to open.

I find myself looking into the elongated face of a feathered serpent. Eyes the size of softballs regard me calmly. "You may call me Pobre," it says. That impossible voice sounds clearly in my head, but the serpent's mouth does not move.

>>>>>(Pobre. That means "pauper." What gives?)<<<<<
—Goliath (12:16:38/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Someone who's lost what's rightfully his—had it taken from him or denied him—might consider himself a pauper, neh? Just a guess.)<<<<<
—Lanza (17:12:27/5-12-56)

:::::[HECATE] Pobre? Anyone we know?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] A lesser, by my reckoning.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Perhaps in form, but not in spirit.

:::::[UMSONDO] Judgment in this instance is hampered by the power of mask and illusion. That which seems is not, and scrutiny reveals naught but deception and change.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] The Watcher cannot see! Our host is misguided and reproved. Are apologies in order?

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Laughing Man should hold his tongue if he has nothing worthy to say.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] In this instance I do not take offense. Let us continue.

Interview with the Serpent

Nicola Forberger: You're the ... um ... the *person* I was supposed to meet?
Pobre: Of course.
NF: So why ... ?
P: [chuckle] For security reasons, of course. The Aztlan forces would love to learn of my location, and would have little concern over using an innocent as a ... a *bird dog*.
NF: So you arranged to have me kidnapped—
P: I prefer the word "diverted."
NF: Listen, I've done this kind of interview before. I know about security. I wasn't followed.
P: I believe you. Yet there are other alternatives, aren't there? A tracking device placed in your vehicle or even on your person. Remote surveillance, technological or magical in nature. You understand. We had to eliminate these possibilities. We scanned your person and your possessions with technology and magic. We are satisfied that you are "clean." Incidentally, you'll be pleased to learn that your aura shows you to be in the best of health.

Now. You arranged this meeting to ask questions.
NF: All right. Is Pobre your real name?

[Pause] Okay, dumb question, I withdraw it.
P: Thank you.

>>>>>(Wonder if "Pobre" is actually Hualpa, the Amazonian wizworm. Anybody got the paydata on that?)<<<<<
—Curious George (05:17:20/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Even if somebody claims to have the answer, I wouldn't know how to go about confirming it or denying it.)<<<<<
—Argent (02:13:02/5-11-56)

NF: What's your position within the rebel organization?
P: I hold a position on the Revolutionary Council. You might consider the Council as similar to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
NF: Are you native to Aztlan?
P: Most definitely not.
NF: Amazonian, then?
P: I am Mexican.
NF: I thought you said you weren't an Aztlaner.
P: I'm not.

>>>>>(Danger, Will Robinson ... Watch your step, Nicola, or you're going to be a serpent snack.)<<<<<
—Attitude Adjuster (01:18:29/5-10-56)

>>>>>(What's the big fragging deal, Aztlaner or Mexican? Same fragging thing, huh?)<<<<<
—Diamondback (02.17:11/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Oh? Diamondback, we haven't met but I know about you. You're Texan, aren't you?)<<<<<
—Argent (02:20:05/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Damn straight.)<<<<<
—Diamondback (02:20:34/5-12-56)

>>>>>(No you're not. You're a CASan, just like my chummer Io, out Atlanta way.)<<<<<
—Argent (02:21:10/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Frag that crosstalk, there's a big fragging difference—Okay, I scan it.)<<<<<
—Diamondback (02:21:52/5-12-56)

>>>>>(There's more to it than that, Argent old droog. It's the historical tradition crap, too. Most people who claim they're "Mexican" instead of "Aztlaner" are harking back to the way Mexico used to be before it blew apart in 2011. But here's the interesting bit—presumably Pobre couldn't have been around before 2011.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (13:17:19/5-13-56)

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Such simple distinctions, but so important.

NF: Mmm. Okay, let's move on. You're in a position where you can speak for the rebel forces, yes?
P: Otherwise I wouldn't have bothered to arrange this meeting.
NF: Then tell me: what's your goal? What is the rebellion's objective?
P: I would have thought that was obvious.
NF: The destruction of Aztlan? The overthrow of the Aztlan government?
P: ~~We have no ambition to destroy the Aztlan government, except insofar as the government prevents us from achieving our goals.~~ **Of course.** We are fighting for what is rightfully ours—what was taken from us centuries ago. For the right to live as we wish to live, with self-determination and respect. **And if the government continues to oppose us, we will do whatever it takes to destroy the nation of Aztlan.**

>>>>>(Ah, drek ... and this edited version went out over the faxnet, right? Nobody but us has seen the original text of the interview?)<<<<<
—Vergis (14:29:06/5-10-56)

>>>>>(You got it. Us, maybe some other people at newsFAXday, and Espectro, of course.)<<<<<
—Talbot (03:27:39/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Why hasn't this Nicola Forberger slitch come forward with her version?)<<<<<
—Monolith (13:37:05/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Can you say "pink slip?" Can you say "blackball?" Can you say, "You'll never work in this industry again?")<<<<<
—Talbot (04:03:17/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Here's another possibility, jokers. Maybe this whole fragging thing's a put-up job by this here Espectro joker. The story that ran on the faxnets was the story the Forberger babe filed. All this deleted/added text is a retrofit, done by Espectro just to yank our fragging chains. (Seems to be working, too.)

Espectro knows the attitudes of Shadowland all too well, is my guess. Just about everyone here's going to swallow any claim that puts the megacorps—and particularly the Big A—in a bad light. Right?

Send flames by personal e-mail to avoid torquing off the other readers of this board. <ducking>)<<<<<
—Findler-Man (14:11:44/5-15-56)

>>>>>(I think you're wrong, Findler. I think I know who Espectro is. A chummer of mine does a little work on occasion for a few folks in a position to know (and I'm not going to say any more than that or someone'll get hurt), and she tells me that there's been a shakeup in the not-quite-top intelligence ranks at the Big Pyramid. Three or four high-placed operatives "fell from grace," and no one knows for sure what happened to them or why. Bet you Espectro's one of those guys.)<<<<<
—Sniffer (16:22:34/5-15-56)

>>>>>(Convenient, isn't it, how you folks who "heard something" from the chummer of a chummer of a chummer can't ever be more specific than that for fear "someone will get hurt.")<<<<<
—Findler-Man (11:12:33/5-16-56)

>>>>>(If Sniffer's right, though ... Snif, ol' slot, you've piqued my interest. Time to do some digging.)<<<<<
—Little Jo (13:34:22/5-16-56)

NF: You say "we." "Us." Who's "we"? Who's "us"?
P: The various peoples who originally inhabited this land. To use the term that became so popular in the last century, the First Nations; the peoples who lived here when the invaders first came to these shores, and who have been so sorely oppressed ever since.

You are a UCAS native, are you not, Señorita Forberger? You are too young to recall the SAIM uprising, the "Indian Wars." But your parents doubtless lived during the struggle for independence and autonomy. Our fight is a continuation of that cycle, the cycle that put an end to colonialism and oppression in North America. Our struggle is "unfinished business," as it were. Until we have our autonomy, the cycle of colonialism has not fully turned.
NF: I think I understand. You see yourselves as freedom fighters, struggling for release from a regime that oppresses your people based on ethnic constraints?
P: ~~Precisely.~~ **That is how it serves us to describe ourselves.**

>>>>>(Man, this is pretty heavy-handed crap. You'd think that somebody who reads newsFAXday would notice that Pobre is dipping himself in drek with this interview. (Unless Findler-Man's right. Hmmm.))<<<<<
—Tenmace (01:14:16/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Have you ever thought about the kind of people who read newsFAXday? The fax-rag's one (small) step up from the screamsheet tabloids. Frag, I wouldn't be surprised to see a back-page article on the latest sighting of Jetblack or Kurt Cobain one of these bright mornings.)<<<<<
—Media Watcher (11:57:41/5-17-56)

NF: Your struggle is being supported by Amazonia, correct?
P: ~~By elements within that nation.~~ Yes.

:::::[HECATE] Truth or not?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Do we look stupid??

NF: Why? What interest does Amazonia have in the Yucatán? **Or does Amazonia have broader goals in all of this?**
P: ~~Anyone with an interest in freedom and justice and fairness~~

~~would support our cause. In Amazonia, my people—the descendants of the Olmecs, the Mayans, the Aztecs, the so-called traditionals—are respected and honored citizens of the nation. It angers them to see how their brothers and sisters are so sorely oppressed within Aztlan. Amazonia has no designs beyond assisting my people in achieving their freedom.~~ **Next question.**

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Sounds too much like Utopia. The truth doesn't quite match the telling, eh, Jungle Cat?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] I will admit there is intolerance, but we do not carve the hearts out of our bretheren to power our arts.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Much ...

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Not funny.

>>>>>(There we go again. Pobre keeps saying "my people." Hinting at some kind of kinship. I suppose it could be a kind of symbolic kinship, but I can't shake the feeling there's more to it than that.)<<<<<

—Blowtorch (12:03:38/5-11-56)

NF: You're also receiving support from elsewhere, aren't you, Pobre?

P: Of course. ~~The willingness to stand up for what is right isn't limited to Amazonia.~~ **Many other factions have a vested interest in the fight against the Aztlaner government.** We receive financial and logistical support from **revolutionary elements in** various of the NAN nations, from Tir Tairngire, and from other sources.

>>>>>(Okay, chummers, let's break it down. What other sources?)<<<<<

—G Lola B (13:29:05/5-10-56)

>>>>>(CAS. No drek, huh? Lord knows, CAS hasn't been much of a shining light when it comes to "respecting and honoring" anyone except beer-swillin', gun-totin' good-ole-boys. But when there's a chance to kick Aztlan in the pills—a little payback for Austin and San Antonio—they're in like a dirty shirt.)<<<<<

—Attitude Adjuster (01:00:32/5-11-56)

>>>>>(I'd watch your mouth, boy, assuming you want to keep it full of teeth.)<<<<<

— Diamondback (02:29:11/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Strip away the sarcasm and Yankee rhetoric, and you've got to admit the kid's got a point, Diamond. Anyhow, who else? I'd add Tir na nÓg to the list for limited financial support backed by a fair whack of useful intelligence, but I can't prove it.

Among the NAN nations, I'd bet on Pueblo (for much the same reasons as CAS) and on Trans-Polar Aleut. (Not much concrete from the TPA, but a whole drekload of moral support. I guess the TPA feel the most kinship with Pobre's traditionals.)

On the other side of the coin, Tsimshian has publicly come out against the rebels, supporting whatever the Aztlan government has to do to keep the peace. I'd guess Tsimshian's betting that Aztlan will flatten the rebels (pretty damn soon, too) and might remember anyone who spoke out in favor of the winning side.)<<<<<

—Argent (02:33:09/5-12-56)

:::::[HECATE] Truth or not?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I suppose that's to me. We are not unsympathetic to the plight of the rebels.

:::::[HECATE] And you, Lady of the Court?

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I'm afraid I'm in no position to comment on our political dealings.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Yeah, right. Are Watchful eyes set in this direction?

:::::[UMSONDO] My gaze is cast in all directions. Laughing Man knows assistance is subtle and indirect when given. I follow the Lady's wisdom.

NF: So far, you—your forces, I mean—have avoided a head-to-head battle with Aztlan's forces. Instead of a standup fight, you've chosen to act as guerrillas—to use hit-and-run tactics, ambushes, and sabotage. Assassinations, and terror attacks on innocent civilian targets, too. Why?

P: The simple answer? In a standup fight, we would surely lose. Our forces are well-equipped, well-trained and well-motivated **to the point of fanaticism,** but still we are outnumbered and outgunned by the Aztlan military ~~and the Aztechnology Corporate Security forces ... as if there is much of a difference these days.~~ Señorita Forberger, I believe you are thinking in terms of the traditional concept of battle, drawn from the major conflicts of the past century and the early days of the EuroWars. But those days—the days of massed units facing other massed units along a clearly demarcated "front"—are long past. Certainly, such formations still exist—facing each other across the Rio Grande, for example—but I do not believe they will ever be used. Today, battles are fought by smaller, more mobile units. Guerrilla tactics, if you will ... though that word carries with it many negative connotations. Sun Tzu would understand the constraints on our actions and approve of our solution. Strike at the enemy's weakness, not at his strength. Defeat him piecemeal. Strike his supply lines. **Destroy his popular support by proving him incapable of protecting the citizenry.** Strike, fade into the countryside, and strike again.

NF: And your forces? A civilian militia, right? **A rabble in arms?**

P: [chuckle] You're several years behind the times, Señorita Forberger. What once was a civilian militia has become a well-trained paramilitary force to be reckoned with; ask the Aztlaners.

NF: You're saying you don't use mercenaries?

P: I'm not saying that at all. Of course we use mercenaries. ~~As do the Aztlaners, since we're speaking of it. But mercenaries do not form the core of our forces, as some people would have you believe. The majority of our soldiers fight for their own personal reasons. They are traditionals, after all. They are fighting for their own freedom.~~

>>>>>(Reality check: Does Aztlan/Aztechnology hire mercenaries?)<<<<<

—Grady (02:10:13/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Thinking of enlisting, Grady-lad?) Yes. Aztlan/Aztechnology hires mercs to fight in the Yucatán. Not too many, and they're pretty fragging selective. But if you don't have a problem with operating under the authority of Azzie officers—and generally not knowing why you're doing what you're doing or how it ties in with the grand campaign—the money's good.

Personally, I wouldn't take an Azzie contract. Not from any moral standpoint, let me assure you. (Neither side of the conflict—Azzie or rebel—is lily white and pure of heart.) My problem is simply that the conflict isn't suitably contained. Aztlan/Aztechnology has other irons in the fire, and I can't be sure the mission I'm given is actually connected to the Yucatán rebellion. Similarly, Aztechnology has a bunch of enemies who won't make the distinction between mercs and other "extended assets." Translation: if I buy it on the battlefield, chill; that's the biz I'm in. But I'd be right choked if I cashed in my chips at the hands of a Saeder-Krupp corporate assassin.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (07:46:41/5-11-56)

NF: And your overall goal is ... ?

P: To make the Yucatán area—my people's traditional lands—ungovernable. To escalate matters to the point where the cost of holding the Yucatán is too high for the Aztlan government to support the effort any longer.

NF: Northern Ireland all over again.

P: ~~Not exactly. Terror attacks against the general population are not part of our plans.~~ **Precisely.**

NF: There have been terrorist attacks on nonmilitary sites, though. Just last month, for example—surely the Cancún-Cozumel hydrofoil ferry was not a military target. How many people died in that incident? One hundred? Two?

P: ~~An unfortunate accident, let me assure you. The missile that struck the Barca Morelos was one of ours, but it was not a surface-to-surface anti-ship missile as the Aztlan government claims. It was a Flecha surface-to-air missile that we fired at an Aztechnology surveillance plane loitering off Puerto Morelos. The surveillance plane triggered countermeasures. Our SAM lost lock and went ballistic. The self-destruct circuit failed. Purest, foulest luck that it struck the ferry.~~

~~Still, much as the deaths saddden me, it must be admitted.~~ The reaction from the people shook public confidence in the government's ability to protect the innocent.

>>>>>(Ooooh, nicely done, well edited. Turn an explanation into a claim of responsibility.)<<<<<

—Tarquin (18:29:31/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Anyone up for a game of "spot the lie"? Check out the worm's explanation.)<<<<<

—Argent (02:36:55/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Okay, I think I getcha. The Flecha's a light SAM, right? Tube-launched, semi-autonomous: sometimes fired from a single launcher mounted on a Hummer. Which means it packs a warhead of ... what? Ten kilos? Twenty, max. Good enough to take down a plane (all you need to do is put hot splinters into the fuel tank anyway). Wouldn't do much against a hydrofoil ferry, though, would it? (Now I think about it, didn't the detonation blow the keel of the Barca Morelos in two?) So it wasn't a Flecha.

And the rest? "Just happened?" I've never been happy with that kind of explanation.

Hmm. Think you're onto something there, Argent ol' chum.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (00:46:10/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Like I said earlier, jokers: neither side is lily white or pure of heart. Believe it.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (08:13:07/5-13-56)

>>>>>(In general, though, I've got to give it to the rebels on points. (As far as propaganda is concerned, at least.))<<<<<

—Bung (15:45:32/5-13-56)

>>>>>(The casualties suffered at Puerto Morelos offer just one example of the collateral damage these guerrilla wars inflict on the innocent population at large. It will not do for us to forget that life in the Yucatán region and other areas affected by the current struggle has become completely unpredictable for the ordinary citizen—creating uncertainty that weighs heavily on their minds, drags down further their already tenuous quality of life, and may even affect the way they relate to those around them. The problems of a society at war are magnified beyond any scope you or I can imagine or understand, and the horrendous results are well documented.

No aspect of a society at war resembles business as usual. Regardless of a person's reason for traveling into such an area, the abnormal climate created by a war mentality means that nothing is as it was or is reported to be. Anyone who hopes to survive a journey into Aztlan or any other war-torn area must accept that death waits around every corner, and may come from the hands of a child as easily as from an experienced soldier. Take heed for your own health, and learn how to deal appropriately with those who have no active part in the conflict.)<<<<<

—Highhorse (09:45:08/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Point well taken, Horsey. Not everyone you meet will be your enemy, but you've got to handle them like unstable explosives until they figure that out. Those people just trying to get by and stay alive are having a real rough time of it, and have been for a while. That said, I can't resist: I'll give you appropriate! Appropriate starts at the business end of my AK-98! <grin>)<<<<<

—Foamer (11:23:35/5-20-56)

NF: And what about the "wall of skulls"? An Aztlaner tech unit vanished without a trace near Tulum. Later, their skulls were found—all 24 of them, piled up neatly to form a wall. Stripped completely clean of flesh, with their ident chips stuffed in their mouths.

P: Psychological warfare. It had an effect on Aztlaner morale, didn't it?

NF: What about the rumors that the techs were actually captured alive, and were subsequently sacrificed in a religious or magical ritual? That the bodies were drained of blood and then consumed by certain of your ... *troops?*
P: [chuckle] You really should be careful about listening to rumors.
NF: Is that a denial?
P: Take it as you will. Next question.

:::::[HECATE] Truth or not?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] I do not know.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] This tells me much. Cat should know and if he says he does not then my suspicions are roused.

:::::>JUNGLE CAT SPITS

:::::[UMSONDO] Wait. This suspicion is logical. But Wordsmyth does not consider that some may be unhappy revealing that they may not know what others feel they should. Few are content to reveal uncertainty.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] How can one be in doubt about such a matter?

:::::[UMSONDO] This is foolishness. Such death crafts a mask around a scene. It is hard to discriminate the mask from the true face of desecration when there are many who have an interest in sustaining the appearance. Hecate cannot be given a true judgment here.

NF: Magic. You use it?
P: Personally?
NF: Your troops.
P: Of course. When one foe is magically adept—and the forces of Aztlan have access to powerful magics, make no mistake; ~~perhaps even more powerful than you know~~—one must counter with magic. One must fight fire with fire.
NF: So it's true that spirits fight alongside your men?
P: Of course. ~~On both sides of the battle. The only difference is that our spirit allies fight for us of their own free will.~~
NF: And blood magic?
P: ~~Again, one must fight fire with fire.~~ **There is no such thing as blood magic.**

>>>>>(Is he saying both sides use blood magic? What the frag is "blood magic" anyway? The only time I've ever heard the term, it referred to the Great Ghost Dance. Does the wizworm mean there's Aztlaner Dancers?)<<<<<
—Brass (19:52:15/5-11-56)

>>>>>(The Great Ghost Dance is the symbolic opposite of blood magic. The Dance was an act of sacrifice; Dancers gave their lives willingly, gladly, for a greater purpose. Blood magic, as Pobre uses the word, is a perversion in which oppression and

exploitation replace willing sacrifice.)<<<<<

—Man-of-Many-Names (22:18:07/5-11-56)

>>>>>((Many-Names? He's baaa-aaack ...) Beg to differ, white-hair. Technically speaking, the Dance was a form of blood magic, with all its attendant consequences. (I've spoken with a couple of runners who have personal knowledge of that fact.) Live with it. You and your shaman pals aren't much different from the Azzie priests who rip out hearts.)<<<<<

—Magister (03:16:04/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Take your flames to another forum, boys. Strictly speaking, you're both right. The Dance was related to blood magic because it drew its power from the life-force of a donor (in this case, many). But because the donors were voluntary, it's different from Azzie-style blood magic. Saying the two are identical is the same as saying an ambulance is identical to a tank because they're both land vehicles.)<<<<<

—The Ref (16:07:22/5-12-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Such ignorance ...

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Part of my point. How are they to know, except by slowly discovering for themselves? And by then, it is too late.

NF: Will there ever be peace in the Yucatán?

P: ~~When my people are recognized as a distinct culture, a sovereign nation.~~ **When the Aztlaner government lies in broken ruins.**

Return

And there it ends, the interview with the serpent. I have more questions, but Pobre just smiles. As I look into his face, his eyes seem to become dark pits of infinite depth. I fall into them, and unconsciousness takes me once more.

I wake an unmeasured time later, sitting in my rented Hummer by the side of a minor road. Reflexively, I pull my personal GPS unit from my pocket. When I left Progreso, I set it to "autotrace" mode. It should have recorded all my movements since I set that zero datum. I'm not surprised to note that the unit's been reset. It tells me where I am—about 15 klicks west of Tizimín—but its memory holds no details about where I've been.

I fire up the engine and pull out onto the road, turning westbound toward Progreso and my flight home. The morning peace is shattered by the high-pitched howl of turbojets in afterburner. Behind me, toward Kantunilkin and Cancún, I see a squadron of four Halcón tank-killer jets hurtling low in close formation over the tree tops. Their Aztlan colors and unit markings catch the early morning light.

>>>>>(You'd think newsFAXday would have sent a reporter with an internal GPS rig.)<<<<<

—Mosaic (21:02:59/5-10-56)

>>>>>(You really think Pobre wouldn't have reset that, too? (Or maybe removed it—a particularly unpleasant thought.))<<<<<

—Clarence the P (05:24:09/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Great. We've got a bimbo reporter interviewing an overgrown fluffy earthworm. Not a fragging bit of useful data about troop deployments, TOE, tactics, and all that good stuff.)<<<<<

—Gaius (14:11:57/5-13-56)

>>>>>(All right, already. You want a military overview, I'll oblige you. The long and the short of it is, Aztlan forces control the roads and the towns and the cleared areas and the coastline (with some interesting exceptions). In general, the rebels control the jungles

Aztlaner SOP calls for its troops to patrol in standard combined-arms units—small mechanized-infantry units with air support in reserve, and maybe some armor, too. The mech infantry runs quick out-and-back patrols and the occasional longer S & D mission, looking for things to drek-kick. Problem is, mech infantry is hamstrung by the jungle when it gets off the roads and away from the towns. (Occasionally, local commanders slash-and-burn parts of the jungle ... but not often because of the political backlash.)

Meanwhile, the rebels don't seem to have an SOP. They change tactics and even operational patterns depending on existing conditions, operational goals, and maybe on the whim of the commanders for all I know. The rebs are deep into hit-and-run tactics, but the definition of "hit" keeps changing. Sometimes a rebel force ghosts into an Aztlaner encampment and booby-traps the materiel, or maybe poisons the food. Sometimes a penetration team kills every tenth Azzie soldier in his sleeping bag. Sometimes they toss willie-peter grenades in and watch things sizzle. Other times they hit the place with a flight of RPVs scattering cluster-bombs. It's a mix of primitive jungle-fighter tactics and cutting-edge military technology ... and scary as hell for the Azzies, you can bet your life on that.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (10:53:21/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Azzie tactics are changing, Whitey, don't forget that. They're learning. Nobody ever said the Azzies were dumb.

Recently, they've been playing around with light infantry units and tactics. They take a mechanized infantry unit and demechanize it, then send the light-fighters out into the jungle to do the same guerrilla hit-and-fade drek as the rebels. Take 'em on in their own territory at their own game. If I was the rebel commander, I'd be worried about that development.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (18:22:25/5-14-56)

>>>>>(You can thank an old chummer of mine for that innovation (or curse him, depending on your attitude, I suppose). Ian Dumfries, that's his name—friends and enemies alike call him "Dumdum" (as in the bullet). Desert Wars veteran, couple of high-rated tours with Ares. Then he went off as a merc. The buzz from the underground is that he's signed on with the Azzies and, for a wonder, the Azzie brass is actually listening to him.

Word to the wise, if you're involved or thinking of getting involved. Dumdum is the quintessential warrior-philosopher, an incredibly bright man, an innovative commander, and someone who's not used to losing.)<<<<<

—Argent (21:10:24/5-14-56)

>>>>>(if he's so fragging smart, why'd he sign a contract with the fragging Azzies? Huh?)<<<<<

—Dogbreath (22:15:01/5-14-56)

INTRODUCTORY BRIEF: OPERATION LIBERTAD

>>>>>(Chummers, the following paydata is translated from Aztlaner Spanish. Where something's obviously a code name, like Operation *Libertad* above, we left it untranslated. Otherwise, we ran it through our best translation programs. (For the techno-wonks among us, the translation we finally settled on was the one churned out by *WORD/word* from FTL Technologies (Cheyenne, Sioux Nation).) Untranslatable words appear in italics, as (untranslatable) followed by the program's best guess.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:08:21/5-1-56)

>>>>>(You should have glossed the code names too, Cap'n. Quite often, the connotations of a code name will tell you something about the op in question—or at least how the Powers That Be view the op in question. (That's why ConsOps always picks its code names randomly from a computer-generated list.) For example, *"libertad"* means "freedom." Kinda telegraphs the rebels' view on things, doesn't it?)<<<<<

—Bourne (06:53:22/5-6-56)

Welcome, friend, to the [*untranslatable—flame/fire?*] of Freedom. By the time you read this, you will have been assigned to Camp *Entrañas*, Camp *Templo* or Camp *Naranja*.

Unlike other campaigns with which you may have served, Operation *Libertad* offers no areas of refuge, no regions "behind the lines" where you can freely and openly admit your affiliation or discuss your involvement. In this war of ours, no battle lines have been drawn or may be drawn. We are, every one of us, infiltrators behind enemy lines. To forget this is to court death for oneself and for our cause.

>>>>>("Flame of Freedom." Is that what the rebels call themselves? I thought they were the Aztlan Freedom League.)<<<<<

—Dobu (05:14:30/5-7-56)

>>>>>(The AFL is a very different animal, Dobu—doubtless fellow-travelers with the rebels, but not directly associated with them. The AFL runs the "underground railroad" that funnels refugees from Aztlan into the CAS and sets them up once they're there.

Keep in mind there's a whole drekload of outfits that've got some kind of ax to grind with the Aztlan government. There's the AFL. There's Orgullo ("Pride"), a hard-hooped Mexican (not Aztlaner) group. There's the Catholic Action Front, and a heaping helping of others. Many of these smaller groups probably have close contact with the rebels—the "Flame of Freedom," or whatever they're calling themselves this week—but contact and identity are very different things.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (23:08.05/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Let us review those introductory paragraphs from the briefing and see what meaning we can tease out of them (consider it an exercise in critical reading, perhaps).

First, the rebels operate from three main camps, to which mercenaries may be assigned. By the by, Captain Chaos, friend Bourne is correct: you should translate the code names. One can learn much from them. Camp Entrañas, for example. Entrañas means "heart," in a symbolic or figurative sense. The rebels' main camp, perhaps? Then there's Camp Templo—Camp "Temple." Would it not be logical to guess that this camp is located near a temple of some kind—perhaps a major set of ruins such as Chichén Itzá, or Tulum, or Tikal, Coba, Uxmal, Kabah, or Labna? And finally, there's Camp Naranja—Camp "Orange" (as the fruit, not the color). Might this camp be near the town of Orange Walk, 50 kilometers south-southwest of Chetumal ... ?)<<<<<

—Royston (23:54:41/5-12-56)

::::: **[JUNGLE CAT] The obvious is such a potent weapon.**

SPHERES OF OPERATION

Currently, we are focusing on three regions of the Yucatán peninsula. This does not eliminate the possibility of operations in other regions, but these three zones demand most of our attention at the current time.

Zone Ghost

This zone is our highest priority as of this writing. This area of the coast is our major beachhead for resupply and rearmament. Aztlan intelligence has recently focused an unhealthy degree of attention on this zone, perhaps suspecting its importance to our efforts. Picket ships, including *Tiburón*-class vessels, are operating off the coast in higher-than-normal concentration. Land- and air-based assets are also increasing their focus.

We must prevent the government forces from interdicting our supply lines at all costs. Missions in Zone Ghost will combine direct action against interdicting forces and diversions to draw those forces elsewhere.

>>>>>(So fragging what? Why do I care? I don't know where the frag this Zone Ghost is. Meaningless drek. Get on with the good stuff, neh?)<<<<<

—Locust-Eater (17:07:01/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Zone Ghost, huh? I wonder. Was the word used in the original Aztlaner Spanish "espíritu," by any chance? If so, check out your map of the Yucatán, chummers. About 200 klicks south of Cancún, there's a bay marked as Bahia de Espíritu Sancto (Bay of the Holy Spirit). Now, to this mother's daughter, the Bay of the Holy Spirit looks like one wizzer of a place to bring cargo into the country without attracting unwanted attention. It's sheltered from storms and drek, and there's squat in the way of towns within about 70 klicks.

I'd bet "Zone Ghost" is the Bay of the Holy Spirit. Any takers?)<<<<<

—Tish (03:35:17/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Patricia my dear, you might well have it.)<<<<<
—Neddy (14:09:53/5-11-56)

Zone Lagos

The area around Camp Templo represents a major opportunity for revolutionary forces. This is one of the few regions where we may be able to establish a beachhead from which to extend direct military action. (Such extension departs from our standard tactics; under the circumstances, however, the risk is worth taking.)

Forces in Zone Lagos are currently screened from surveillance by a combination of technological and magical factors. Tests have shown that even our own sensors cannot penetrate this combined screen. We have little reason to expect that Aztlaner sensors can do so.

>>>>>(That's drifting perilously close to overconfidence, if you ask me.)<<<<<
—Arctic White (08:19:30/5-13-56)

Operations in this zone will concentrate on reinforcing the units already present and extending the range of our screening. The next several months represent a time of greatest risk for this operation, as reinforcement and enhancement may compromise secrecy. Penetration by Aztlaner assets may well compromise not only Zone Lagos but the very existence of Camp Templo. Once this interim period has passed, however, Zone Lagos will serve as a staging area for a major conventional-military drive against Aztlaner troop concentrations and logistical centers.

Recruits whose interests lie in direct unit-to-unit conflict rather than guerrilla-type operations should consider transferring to Camp Templo and Zone Lagos.

>>>>>(I don't get this at all. Lagos—that's in Nigeria, neh?)<<<<<
—Puzzled in Philly (09:22:10/5-12-56)

>>>>>(I think I've got something to say about this zone, too. My bet is the translation program made the same assumption as PinP: Lagos is the city in Nigeria, and hence not to be translated. But if I remember my elementary-school Spanish, lagos means "lakes." Honto?

Now, connect that with something chummer Royston said awhile back. He figured "Camp Templo" was near (no drek!) a temple. In his list of possibilities, he included Tikal. Check your maps, boys and girls, and scope out Tikal (for anyone with a real old map, it's in what used to be Guatemala, near the Belize border). Notice those things scattered around it? Lakes. My bet is that Camp Templo is in Tikal or near it, and Zone Lagos is the largely undeveloped area around the ruins.)<<<<<
—Tish (02:59:28/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Could be, Tish. If you're right, this could well be the next hot spot of the civil war.)<<<<<
—Arctic White (08:22:28/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Particularly if the Azzies read this board.

Hey, wait a tick. We know Espectro is an Azzie asset, right? Then the Azzies already know about Camp Templo and Zone Lagos, don't they? Whitey, I got the feeling that spot is going to get real hot real fast ...)<<<<<
—Argent (10:56:01/5-13-56)

Zone Cathedral

Over the next several months, additional assets will be transferred to Zone Cathedral and the intensity of operations against Point Polyphemus will be stepped up. We have greatly disrupted Aztlaner operations at Point Polyphemus over the past year, but the key facility in the region remains functional. For obvious reasons, our operations in Zone Cathedral will support our goals in Zone Ghost.

Aztlaner forces in Zone Cathedral are extensive and concentrated around Point Polyphemus. Direct, head-to-head combat is inadvisable because of dense enemy troop concentrations. Strike-and-withdraw tactics must be continued, but the striking power of raid teams must take into account enemy defenses. Squad-level raids have had limited effect. We believe that platoon-level raids are the only option, regardless of the increased risk of detection during approach.

>>>>>(I'll give this one a shot, too, since I'm on a roll. At first I thought the rebs had finally gotten the idea about non-communicative code names ..

But then I did some database-surfing and came up with a couple of interesting possibilities for Zone Cathedral. First, the city of Mérida is famous for its 16th-century cathedral. Then I got to thinking about "Point Polyphemus." Polyphemus was the Cyclops who hashed it out with Odysseus in Greek legend. Cyclops's single eye is a major vulnerability (as Odysseus figured out). Well, there's something of equivalent importance around Mérida: the phased-array radar installation at Progreso. That's Aztlan's one big eye on the Yucatán coastline

Ten to one Zone Cathedral is the Mérida area, and Point Polyphemus is Progreso. Am I brilliant or what?)<<<<<
—Tish (03:23:55/5-13-56)

>>>>>(What.)<<<<<
—Bung (07:12:26/5-13-56)

HISTORY

>>>>>(This section is from Espectro's original download. He doesn't give a source for this oversimplified history, but from the tone I'd guess it's courtesy of the Aztlaner educational system—especially since it's marked by the kind of chauvinistic attitude the entire Aztlan nation tends to show. In light of the file he provided that offers the rundown on the civil war centered in the Yucatán, I'd recommend that readers interested in the clean deal keep that war firmly in mind while reading the following (unquestionably biased) interpretation of the facts and factoids. It's probably true as far as it goes, but I think we can all assume that Espectro included this text to make some kind of point.

I've taken the liberty of axing huge chunks of the text our ghost provided in the interest of actually keeping the hard-boys' attention long enough for them to grasp the true importance of what's being said. Besides, most of it just doesn't matter in this context!)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:25:16/5-1-56)

OUR GLORIOUS HERITAGE

The traditions of the Aztlan culture—*our* culture—extend far back into the ancient past. Aztlan, and Mexico before it, were home to the oldest and most advanced civilizations in this hemisphere. And so it comes as little surprise, then, that our civilization and culture remain superior to our neighboring cultures in the Western Hemisphere.

>>>>>("Chauvinistic" doesn't do it justice. Try "arrogant, condescending and just fragging sickening.")<<<<<

—Larkspur (00:26:39/5-3-56)

Archaeological evidence shows that our lands were home to a hunting people as far back as 21,000 B.C.E.—perhaps even earlier. By 8,000 B.C.E. our ancestors had begun to cultivate crops like squash—arguably the first people on the North or South American continents to do so.

>>>>>(Back up and freeze a tick. Is it just me, or is there some kind of contradiction here? I always thought that the Aztlaner upper classes were generally of Spanish descent—that the Mesoamerinds were the peasants, the lower classes, the burakumin. Honto?

So what's this drek about "our" ancestors then? The true descendants of these ancient civilizations are the dirt-poor traditionals that Aztlan's upper crust so loves to harsh on.)<<<<<

—The Bandit of Love (23:44:16/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Bandit, you've just hit on the central contradiction hypocrisy at the heart of Aztlaner society. The higher-ups are of Spanish descent—and goddamned proud of it, too, thank you very much. And the traditionals are second-class (or worse) citizens in the lands their ancestors once ruled. But we're talking cultural identity here. And cultural identity has squat all to do with reality. It's all about the perception of reality—fantasy, if you will.

Modern Aztlaners are stinking proud that their culture dates back to the Aztecs (hence the name of the country), and even to the Olmecs that preceded them. And in a sense they're right. They have brought back a lot of the old symbols and concepts, including the religion and the cultural subtext. In a sense, they've recreated a culture—a culture that their direct ancestors suppressed and nearly obliterated. The real descendants of the Aztecs and the Olmecs are those poor, starving subsistence farmers who grub out a living in the interior or burn the forests of the Yucatán to revitalize the soil that keeps them alive.

How do the modern Aztlaners reconcile these facts? Don't know, chummer, not my department. And don't bother to ask an Aztlaner. If he doesn't buy into this kind of conceptual deck-stacking, he won't be able to answer you. If he does buy in, he'll punch you in the snout or slit your giblets for having the temerity to ask. Either way, you ain't going to get an answer.)<<<<<

—Doc (10:34:51/5-10-56)

>>>>>(I find this intellectual dishonesty the most insulting characteristic of the self-styled "Aztec lords" who have taken over my country. This reason, above all the other good and valid reasons, has persuaded me to join with the freedom fighters of the Yucatán. The traditionals should be the beneficiaries of the Aztec traditions and the Olmec and Mayan and Toltec cultures.

This is not to deride my own culture—that of Mexico, and of Mexicans. I am proud of our many achievements, and I feel shame for our many sins. Yet to conflate Mexican culture with "traditional" culture is to cheapen and insult both. Such an act derides my culture as somehow unworthy and meaningless and appropriates the ancient cultures from their true inheritors. This is the core of my argument with the Aztlan nation.)<<<<<

—Matador (14:19:00/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Get off your fragging high horse, Matador. You're in it cuz it's a good scrap, and you're with the rebels because they've stroked your overgrown merc ego. End of story.)<<<<<

—Smiley (01:42:05/5-13-56)

The Mesoamerind people we call the Olmec established the first major civilization in our land during a period that lasted from 1500 B.C.E. to 200 B.C.E. In the heavily jungled, swampy river deltas along the Gulf Coast—in what today are the states of Vera Cruz and Tabasco—the Olmecs built surprisingly sophisticated cities and temples of stone. The first pyramid built in the Americas rose from the heart of the city of La Venta, the center of their enduring civilization. An axial arrangement of plazas and temples surrounded this great architectural landmark.

>>>>>(Take note: La Venta is also the name of a revolutionary organization created in 2044 by a feathered serpent who goes by the name of Henequen. (The buzz says he's hiding from Aztechnology pay-back squads in Denver these days.) Don't know what his problem is with the Azzies, but apparently it's a hot one. Maybe the feathered worm is as torqued off as Matador about the Azzies "appropriating" traditional cultures.)<<<<<

—Marguerita (17:13:06/5-12-56)

>>>>>(You gotta be a little more careful 'bout what rumors you believe, you ask me, Marge.)<<<<<

—Dynalink (18:21:24/5-12-56)

During the dominance of the Olmec, another group of tribes, with a distinct linguistic tradition and culture, were developing to the west and south. The Mayan tribes began to build their civilization in the Yucatán and the modern Aztlaner states of Campeche, Chiapas Belize, and Guatemala by the year 1400 B.C.E. The Mayan tribes did not emerge as a major force, however, until several centuries after the Olmec civilization faded. During the Classic period of the Mayan culture (300 C.E. to 900 C.E.), these tribes built such enduring monuments as the cities of Palenque, Tikal, and Copán (today spelled Coban). In addition to raising the architectural mastery of the Olmec to new heights, the Maya developed highly advanced systems of mathematics

and astronomy; created refined, enduring art; and domesticated the dog and the turkey, as well as producing numerous other achievements.

While the Mayan civilization climbed steadily to its zenith, another group founded the city of Teotihuacán, about 40 kilometers north of present-day Tenochtitlán. Founded just before the birth of the Christian Era and inhabited until approximately 700 C.E., Teotihuacán covered more than 1.3 million hectares and boasted a population of more than 70,000. Three major monuments lay at its heart: the Temple of the Sun (one of the largest pyramids ever built in the area), the Temple of the Moon, and the Avenue of the Dead. The sublime architecture and culture of the people of Teotihuacán influenced both the Maya of the Yucatán and civilizations that followed.

Around the year 900 C.E., for reasons that remain unknown to this day, the Maya withdrew from their great cities and migrated into the jungles of the Yucatán peninsula, where they continued to dwell for centuries.

>>>>>(Ancient cities, fragging pyramids—who the frag cares about this drek, tell me that?)<<<<<

—Laser's Edge (17:29:52/5-9-56)

>>>>>(You should, if you ever plan to visit Aztlan. All this "drek" is at the heart of modern Aztlaner culture, which is basically a mishmash of Mayan, Toltec, and Aztec (and a little Olmec, maybe) culture. You can't understand the present without knowing the past. Unless you're totally brain-fragged (a distinct possibility, judging by your post, now I think about it) you'll take some notes.)<<<<<

—Webster (18:22:33/5-11-56)

As the Mayans withdrew from their old cities, another group was migrating from the north. The warlike Toltec soon established an empire in the Valley of Mexico, north of present-day Tenochtitlán. Tollán (sometimes called Tula) served as the capital of the militaristic Toltec empire. A great temple dedicated to Quetzalcóatl, the Plumed Serpent, dominated the city. (Like the temple in Tenochtitlán dedicated to Quetzalcóatl, five-meter-high columns depicting warriors "guarded" the Tollán temple.)

>>>>>(Translation note: The word used for "temple" in the original draft is *teocalli*. You're sure to run into it again—if not in Aztlan itself, then elsewhere in this file.)<<<<<

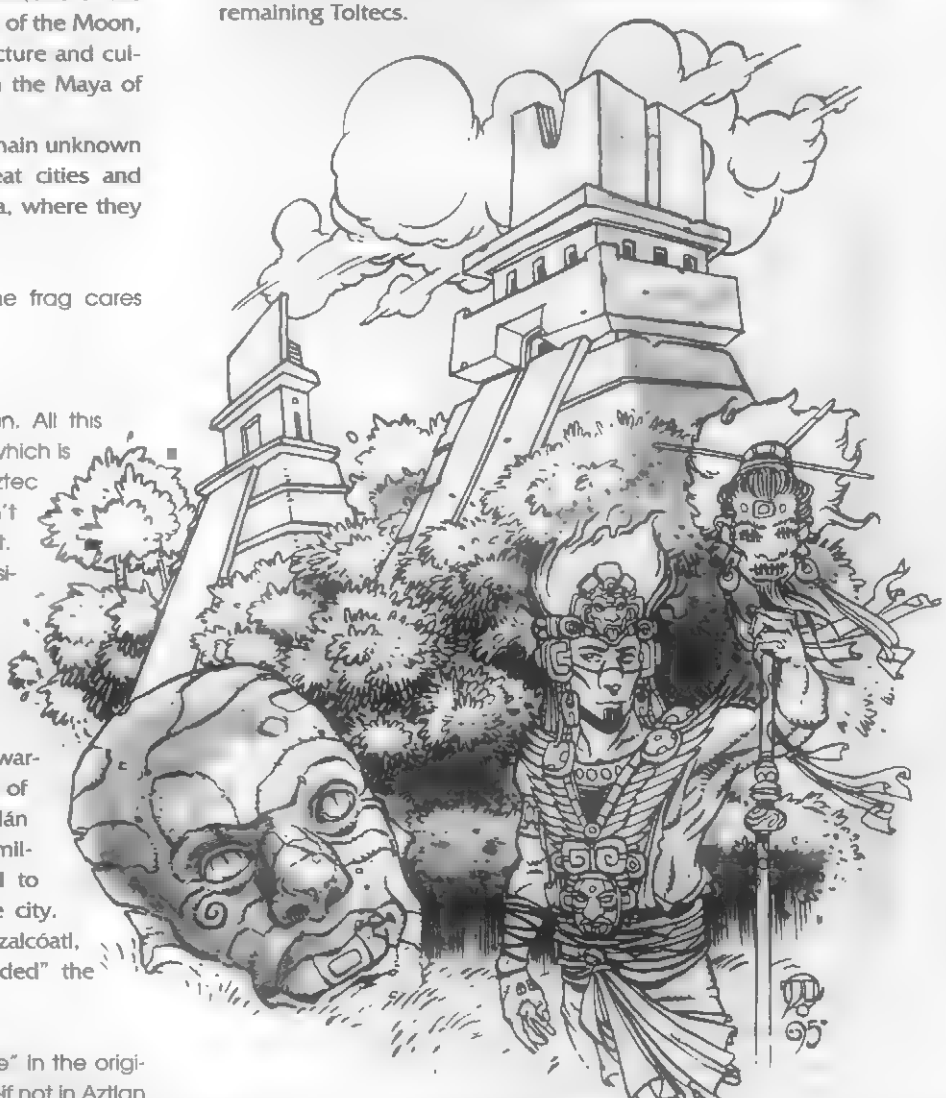
—Captain Chaos (12:29:01/5-1-56)

>>>>>(Here's another contradiction of Aztlaner culture for anyone who's keeping score. Last time I visited Tenochtitlán, I saw two teocalli—one dedicated to Quetzalcóatl, one to another deity, Tezcatlipoca—facing each other across a major avenue. Traditionally, Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcóatl were rivals. According to Toltec legend, Tezcatlipoca drove Quetzalcóatl and his serpent-worshippers out of Tollán/Tula around 1000 C.E. The serpent worshippers moved south and occupied the Mayan city of Chichén Itzá, turning it into their capital and major religious center.

I can't help but think if Quetzalcóatl and Tezcatlipoca actually exist, they've gotta be a mite ticked having their temples staring at each other like that.)<<<<<

—Holly (18:08.42/5-4-56)

In the 12th century C.E., Toltec civilization began to decline as other tribes invaded Aztlan's central valley and eventually sacked Tollán. In the south, the Maya eventually absorbed the remaining Toltecs.



>>>>>(A little bit of poetic justice, considering that the Toltecs had conquered the Maya awhile back.)<<<<<

—Holly (18:09:57/5-4-56)

The final major addition to our great culture came a century later, when a group of seven tribes—the Nahuatlan tribes—moved into the valley from the north. The leading tribe among this group was the Aztec, otherwise known as the Mexica. In

1325, they founded Tenochtitlán and turned it into a major fortress over the next decades. The Aztec quickly extended their influence throughout the Valley of Mexico, becoming the predominate power in the region by the 15th century.

As we all know, the Aztec civilization was artistically and intellectually developed to an incredible degree, putting to shame most contemporary civilizations elsewhere in the world. The Aztec built great cities and became ever more sophisticated in terms of society, politics, and religion. We draw many central tenets and symbols of our own culture from this great and glorious civilization. The light that burned so brightly at the heart of Aztec civilization continues to burn today in Aztlan, a beacon for the rest of the world to follow.

>>>>>(Uurgh, pass me a bucket.)<<<<<
—Bung (19:43:06/5-10-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] And the concept of a proto-culture never occurs to them? I sometimes sympathize with The Big 'D' s (I feel so silly writing that ...) desire to tell the truth, but most of the time I look at the short-sightedness and willful ignorance of the people of this era and cringe. Telling them, I fear, would not help them.

:::::[HECATE] I'm amused by the reference to 8000 B.C.E. and the fact that the people of the area were the first to begin cultivating squash by then. Very funny.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Indeed.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] It is also interesting that so many of the cultural trappings they've chosen come from a culture that is a mere 600 years old.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Yes, always best to reach back to that really ancient Celtic tradition.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] You are pushing me.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Yup. <chuckle>

THE COLONIAL INVASION

The first of the European explorers to visit our shores was Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, who reached the Yucatán in 1517 and encountered the descendants of the great Mayan civilization. In 1518 he was followed by Juan de Grijalva, who brought reports of the rich Aztec empire back to the Spanish colony in Cuba. Prompted by these reports, Diego de Velázquez, the governor of Cuba, sent a large force to our shores the following year. The expeditionary force was led by the Great Killer, Hernán Cortés.

>>>>>(Okay, chummers, I've whacked out about 2.3 Mp of text on the conquest of the Aztec empire by the "Great Killer" (an interesting sobriquet, neh?). If you want the real deal on all this, go to some other source.

The 2.3 Mp I expunged contradicted itself pretty thoroughly, by the by. The Spanish colonial forces are described as both "genocidal maniacs" and "enlightened benefactors" who helped bring Mexico out of its dark ages. Go figure.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (12:37:17/5-1-56)

>>>>>("Cultural identity" again. Like I said earlier, it doesn't have to make sense.)<<<<<
—Doc (10:51:10/5-10-56)

>>>>>(The treatment of the native Mesoamerinds by the Spanish conquerors is one of the sins I mentioned in my earlier post. Although the Mesoamerind population was nominally "free" and entitled to wages for the work they performed, the conquistadores treated them as little more than slaves. Later attempts by the sovereign Mexican government to recompense the oppressed cannot fully expunge this stain on our national character.)<<<<<
—Matador (14:38:14/5-11-56)

>>>>>(I left in the following drek because it still affects Aztlan today.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (12:38:56/5-1-56)

During this period, the Roman Catholic Church became a monument to overweening power, wealth, and greed. Missionaries—largely Jesuit, Franciscan, Augustinian, and Dominican—entered the country with the conquistadores and carved out an "empire" for the Catholic Church. The church became vastly wealthy through gifts and bequests that it held in perpetuity. Until the church's holdings were nationalized in 1859, the Roman Catholic monolith owned a full *33 percent* of all land and property within our shores.

>>>>>(Ah, the Jesuits, soldiers of Christ. Still kicking around today, those boys—even though their order was officially suppressed by the Aztlaner government 20 years back. Serving as the Vatican State's shock troops, they're still heavily involved in various anti-government cabals and movements.)<<<<<
—Marcus (10:27:52/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Philosophical shock troops, maybe. But even the Jesuits' vaunted powers of debate and persuasion ain't gonna do much good against an attack chopper, neh?)<<<<<
—Link (10:29:03/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Chummer, you've obviously never met up with any New Jesuits. When I said "soldiers of Christ," I meant soldiers. The New Society of Jesus still teaches its people how to debate the hind leg off a feral mule, but its members also fight like angry buzz saws. A Bible in one hand, an SMG in the other—and no, I'm not kidding. "If it doesn't see reason, blow the drek out of it.")<<<<<
—Marcus (09:56:10/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Black-robes with assault cannons? Fragging scary thought.)<<<<<

—Carver (23:01:48/5-10-56)

>>>>>(The New Society of Jesus contains little than can be considered "new." Our mandate has always been the spread of the Church by preaching and teaching, or the fulfillment of whatever else is judged the most urgent need of the Church at the time Whatever changes may appear to have taken place, they have been in the needs of the Church, not our willingness or ability to carry out our duties. Ad majorem Dei gloriam.)<<<<<

—Locutor (02:27:52/5-11-56)

>>>>>(I'll let you in on a fairly well-kept secret. Some of the nova-hottest deckers in the fragging world are Jesuits. Believe it.)<<<<<

—FastJack (03:21:54/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Again, I've yarded out another 1.7 Mp. (Figured you didn't need or want to know about the difference between peninsulares and criollos and all that drek.))<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:40:02/5-12-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Do any of you possess information on the New Jesuits?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] My Lady, I'd have thought you'd know more about this than the rest of us.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Perhaps I do.

THE REVOLUTION

The first spark of rebellion was ignited in 1810, when Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a village priest in Dolores, demanded the abolition of caste distinctions and an end to the oppression of Mesoamerinds. The Hidalgo Revolt, as it is now called, eventually failed, and Hidalgo himself was captured and executed in 1811.

>>>>>(Thus to all priests, you ask me.)<<<<<

—Bonzo Dog (19:42:25/5-10-56)

The liberation movement itself didn't end, however. In 1814 another priest—José Maria Morelos y Pavón—proclaimed a Mexican republic, independent of Spain. Again, the revolutionaries were violently suppressed by royalist forces. The banner of revolution then passed to Vicente Guerrero.

>>>>>(And again, I've excised another 2.1 megapulses of blathering. (Man, do these Aztlaners run off at the mouth.) If you really need to know this drek, I can point you in the direction of a good history database.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:42:57/5-1-56)

In 1821, all parties involved in the dispute signed the Plan of Iguala, providing three major guarantees that would profoundly affect the future of Mexico. First, Mexico would become an independent country, ruled as a limited monarchy. Second, the Spanish and Creoles would be given equal rights and privileges. Finally, the Roman Catholic Church would become the state church. The formal beginning of Mexican independence was marked with the signing of the Treaty of Córdoba in July 1821.

EMPIRE AND REPUBLIC

>>>>>(Nothing of vital interest here. Add another 2.1 Mp to the bit-bucket.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:45:00/5-1-56)

THE MEXICAN-AMERICAN WAR

For the first quarter of the 19th century, the territory of Texas was under Mexican rule. In 1829, the Texicans (as they were known to many at the time) took umbrage at a decree by President Santa Anna that abolished slavery. Santa Anna's further intention to centralize the government fanned their resentment, and in 1836 Texas rebelled.

>>>>>(More excised for the sake of brevity. If you're particularly interested in reading a fascinating revisionist description of the Battle of the Alamo and an apologia explaining just how Sam Houston waxed Santa Anna's hoop at San Jacinto (Texan spies slipped poison into Santa Anna's frijoles—I drek you not, that's what it claims), the whole 3.2 megapulse opus can be found in an appendix file. Crosslink to /html:/shadow.blather/append1/pubs/mix.ftp/Azzie-apologia.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:48:21/5-1-56)

On May 12, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico.

>>>>>(And yet again, more apologia explaining—not quite so convincingly this time—how the Satan-spawned U.S. troops occupied Mexico City in 1847 (more Yanqui treachery, of course). Suffice it to say that in 1848, the Rio Grande was fixed as the Texan border, and California and New Mexico became part of the U.S. And add another 4.1 Mp to the bit-bucket.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:49:59/5-1-56)

JUÁREZ AND MAXIMILIAN

>>>>>(And this too shall pass.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:51:14/5-1-56)

DÍAZ, ZAPATA AND VILLA

>>>>>(Ditto.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:51:58/5-1-56)

THE NEW REVOLUTION

>>>>>(Nasty infighting, labor unrest, political dirty tricks—nothing you haven't seen before.

Aw, frag it, I'm taking out everything up to the turn of the century. This post isn't a fragging history lesson.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (12:55:31/5-1-56)

>>>>>(About fragging time.)<<<<<
—Bonzo Dog (19:46:10/5-10-56)

THE CENTURY TURNS

By the turn of the 21st century, the PRI (the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, or Institutional Revolutionary Party) seemed to have renewed its grip on Mexico. Frequent scandals and the occasional assassination merely seemed to reinforce the incumbent party's determination to hold on to power. The major opposition parties—the *Frente Democrático Nacional* (National Democratic Front, or FDN) and the *Partido de Acción Nacional* (National Action Party, or PAN)—were in disarray, and the nation's various fringe groups were becoming increasingly marginalized. The Roman Catholic Church provided support to the PAN, but this made little difference in the grand scheme of things; by 2001, renewed government restrictions on the church had severely lessened its real influence in the urban areas, which by now contained more than 75 percent of Mexico's population.

>>>>>(Those restrictions prompted the Jesuits—and eventually the New Jesuits (members of the New Society of Jesus)—to send some of their heavy hitters to Mexico. It'd be awhile before the Jesuits were formally suppressed, but they sure weren't popular—particularly in the Distrito Federal and Mexico City.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (09:20:16/5-10-56)

Then in 2004, scandals of a grand new scale rocked the PRI. The PRI president, Miguel Ávila, was exposed as having accepted large bribes from various organizations in the United States. Other high-level party members were shown to have links to the increasingly powerful drug cartels in Colombia and Panama. When Ávila's administration was also linked to the death of a labor leader who was an outspoken critic of government policy, the eventual fall of the PRI seemed certain. The following year a special election swept the PRI from power and replaced the party with a coalition of the PAN and the FDN.

>>>>>(A close examination proves that a lot of those "scandals" were actually agitprop cobbled together by those strange bedfellows—the leftist FDN and the Catholic PAN. There's some evidence still kicking around that suggests the Jesuits played a major role in "uncovering" some of those scandals. Ad majorem whatever, neh?)<<<<<
—Carthago (12:58:42/5-13-56)

>>>>>(An unbiased examination of the historical records will prove your scurrilous innuendo to be totally unfounded.)<<<<<
—Locutor (01:51:00/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Word to the wise: Even though the present Aztlaner government claims it started off with a "clean slate" in terms of personnel, it still contains a lot of individuals who maintain their links to the old FDN, PAN, and even the PRI. (And despite Locutor's claims, the Jesuits are still up to their old tricks.) And the government's closets hold a drekload of skeletons and buried bodies (symbolically, at least). When you're trying to make sense of some of the weird conniptions within the Aztlaner government, you've got to look back to this period of history to understand the dynamics. (Whoever said the past is past?))<<<<<
—Socio Pat (14:52:02/5-16-56)

During the next few years, both the FDN and the PAN began to view a strong business community as a threat to their power. Working from different philosophical bases, they enacted ever-more-restrictive constraints on business activity by major Mexican corporations such as the petroleum giant Pemex. By 2009, the business leaders of the nation had joined forces to resist these repressive laws. Business interests began to withdraw their support from all government-administered programs—sometimes sacrificing their corporate officers to criminal charges and imprisonment in order to make their point. Corporations boycotted institutions such as the Business Relations Board and took steps to reveal to the populace that these symbols of business–government "cooperation and consultation" were merely shams. The population became increasingly disenchanted with the FDN/PAN coalition and increasingly supportive of the business community as the truth of these corporations' claims became self-evident.

>>>>>(Hmm, more apologia—for Big Business this time. Right?)<<<<<
—Carstairs (10:11:04/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Well, what do you expect? Aztlan/Aztechnology was founded by Big Business interests. Read on, MacDuff.)<<<<<
—Doc (12:37:16/5-10-56)

CHAOS AND RENAISSANCE

Already struggling to stay on its feet, the ever-more-repressive PAN/FDN coalition was totally unprepared for the chaos that struck with the VITAS pandemic in 2010. The government disintegrated the following year, plunging Mexico into bloody chaos. Fortunately—some might say predictably—the Mexican business community came to the rescue. Corporations such as Pemex and ORO distributed medical aid to those in need and disbursed countless billions of pesos to bolster the economy. The Roman Catholic Church took this opportunity to make an attempt to capitalize on the confusion and re-establish its dominance in the post-VITAS nation. Unfortunately for the church, the papal Bull that declared metahumanity to be an abomination alienated the parishioners whose children goblinized or were born metahuman. The church that would surely have turned post-VITAS Mexico into a claustrophobic, superstition-ridden theocracy if it had regained control over the populace lost this opportunity to the intervention of secular interests—again, mainly business entities.

>>>>>(An interesting way of looking at things. Kinda one-sided, doncha think?)<<<<<
—Benny G (11:11:13/5-12-56)

>>>>>(A hideous distortion of events. The Holy Catholic Church was prevented from many charitable and philanthropic endeavors because its actions clashed with the intentions of those who would turn the nation into a plutocracy—ruled by the rich, and by business interests, for their own benefit and none other's.)<<<<<

—Locutor (01:58.27/5-14-56)

>>>>>(And that's kinda one-sided too. The truth's always a little more complicated than people would have us believe.)<<<<<

—Benny G (10:56.01/5-14-56)

Mexico's business community formed a caretaker government to keep the nation functioning until a new, popularly elected government could be established. Under popular pressure to remain in place, this caretaker government served the nation for four years until 2015, ensuring that the nation's infrastructure survived and that the populace continued to have access to the services usually supplied by governments. Finally, however—amid popular demands to remain—the interim corporate government stepped aside to make room for the current system of direct democracy.

Establishing the Direct-Democracy Model

Political scientists had long claimed that the days of representative democracy had come to an end, made obsolete by technology that could provide every citizen in a nation with a direct say in its governance, without the intermediary of elected representatives. With the increased pervasiveness of the Matrix, it had become possible for each and every citizen to vote directly for every elected office and to participate in national plebiscites.

>>>>>(Each and every citizen who happened to have a Matrix link-up—a group that probably didn't include those Mayan and Aztec subsistence farmers, neh? (But hey, they don't count anyway, right?) Looks like another "-ocracy," doesn't it? A technocracy this time: power in the hands of the people with the tech.)<<<<<

—Nexus Ranger (00:31:58/5-10-56)

The first Matrix-based electoral system was built by ORO Corp., which absorbed all installation, configuration and administration costs as a public service. The system provided the means for the first direct election in Mexican history, which took place on May 5, 2015. The Azatlán party assumed power and has consistently been re-elected to office since.

>>>>>(Well no drek, Sherlock. The advantage of a direct electoral system is that everyone gets to vote on everything—and whoever's in charge of the central computer system gets to manipulate the vote on everything. By generously establishing the electoral computer system—as a public service, of course—ORO bought not only the first election, but every one thereafter. Such a deal I have for you.)<<<<<

—Crystal (10:48:17/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Fragging near impossible to prove, though. Lord knows I've tried. The original ORO electoral system still exists as a tertiary subprocessor net in the central Aztechnology datacores these days. (Note I did say Aztechnology, not Aztlan.) I almost stroked a lobe trying to slice in that deep. I'll have more to say on it later, but those central datacores come near to rivaling the Denver Data Haven—the Nexus—for slick architecture and nasty ice. It's so black in there that a bud of mine, the Low Ranger, calls it the Heart of Darkness.)<<<<<

—FastJack (21:19:11/5-9-56)

The Azatlán Party

The Azatlán Party—and the entire Aztlaner nation, it can be argued—was the brainchild of Francisco Pavón y Guetterrez del Córdoba. Pavón was born in the southeastern city of Córdoba in the year 1980. During his boyhood, he was trained by Jesuits in Mexico City, but by the age of 25 had turned against the superstitions and empty ritual of the Catholic church. For the next ten years, he pursued his advanced education in a purely secular manner.

Pavón had always been fascinated by the ancient history of his nation, by the strengths and achievements of the cultures that had foreshadowed his own. Through the years, he came to feel ever more kinship with the ancient beliefs. Eventually, he came to understand how much spiritual wealth had been lost when his people abandoned, and in some cases actively *suppressed*, the Old Ways. With the return of magic to the world in 2011, he realized that many of these denounced spiritual beliefs actually contained truth. The deities worshipped by the ancients were more than empty myth, more than "psychological crutches" on which the credulous leaned. Over the next two years, he accepted and pursued the path of Quetzalcóatl.

>>>>>(In other words, he became a shaman, a follower of the Plumed Serpent Totem.)<<<<<
—Tracer (19:26:15/5-6-56)

Many like-minded people flocked to him, and he quickly became the leader and spokesperson of the Azatlán Party, a movement that advocated a return to the natural development and growth of the Old Ways. (The name itself, Azatlán, refers to the mythical homeland of the Aztecs.) According to the movement, the nation of Mexico could only lift itself from the post-VITAS chaos by returning to its roots, by seeking out and following the ancient truths that had been at the heart of those sophisticated, long-lost civilizations that had preceeded it. By 2014, the Azatlán Party was known, respected and even loved throughout the nation of Mexico. When the corporate caretaker government announced that general elections would be held in May of the following year, Pavón's followers nominated him as their presidential candidate, and he accepted their support. When the data channels were closed and the votes tabulated at midnight on May 5, 2015, Francisco Pavón became the first directly elected president of Mexico. Additionally, party members had won all the major posts in the new government.

>>>>>(Pretty damned simplistic description of a real nasty can of worms. What about the terrorist-style attacks on Catholic churches attributed to Azatlán Party faithful? What about the massive corporate support the Azatlán movement enjoyed? What about—aaah, you get the point.)<<<<<
—Sangre (14:34:28/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Are you trying to tell me that in the span of ten years a disenchanted Jesuit-wannabe had created a party of faithful that pretty well took over an entire fragging country? Cut me loose.)<<<<<
—Larkspur (09:42:19/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Muhammed did almost as well, back in the 7th century. And he didn't have the advantages of instantaneous communication, fast travel, and massive corporate backing.)<<<<<
—Holly (13:59:52/5-11-56)

Pavón's first major act as newly installed president was to rename his country *Aztlan*—a simplification and modernization of the mythical homeland of the Aztec—*Azatlán*.

>>>>>(More for the bit-bucket, 1.8 Mp this time—I figured you really didn't need to know all the details about Pavón's tenure in office. Oh, yeah, while I'm at it—if you're looking for dirt on how Aztechnology (still called ORO Corp.) fits into all of this, you'll find it in the following file. (And it's a beaut.))<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (13:04:44/5-1-56)

Pavón served his country well, until he was called home by the Plumed Serpent in 2033.

>>>>>("Called home." Such a lovely euphemism. Much more elegant than "cacked in a palace coup.")<<<<<
—Argent (04:57:24/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Why off him?)<<<<<
—Sonic Sal (13:06:15/5-9-56)

>>>>>(He made the big mistake of not jumping high enough when his "handlers" at ORO Corp. gave the order. They replaced him with someone a little more tractable.)<<<<<
—Argent (00:08:10/5-10-56)

National Growth

During Pavón's tenure as president, grave events engulfed North America. The Sovereign American Indian Movement (SAIM) fought its battles with the United States, and Pavón expressed Aztlan's support for SAIM's fight for freedom. Though Aztlan was unable to commit military forces to the struggle for various reasons, Aztlan did provide a safe haven for fugitives from the vengeful U.S. government, as well as supplies and logistical aid. But most important of all, Aztlan provided the SAIM warriors with crucial "moral support"—the knowledge that a major nation supported them and wholeheartedly believed in their cause.

>>>>>(Uurgh. Is that bucket still around here anywhere?)<<<<<
—Bung (19:58:17/5-10-56)

>>>>>("Unable to commit military forces for various reasons"? More like Pavón couldn't tell which side would win. Much better to sit back and wait to see the outcome before you place your bets, neh?)<<<<<
—Arctic White (06:59:00/5-11-56)

When the Native American Nations (NAN) were forming in 2017 and 2018, Aztlan was invited to join what would become the Sovereign Tribal Council (STC). This was a logical step at the

time, because the fledgling STC recognized that Aztlaner interests matched their aims almost perfectly. After all, wasn't Aztlan another nation—just like theirs—wishing to return to the golden age before Colonialism and live according to the Old Ways? Pavón accepted the invitation gladly.

>>>>>(Of course he did—he could see the writing on the wall. Even if he didn't know what form it would take, he knew there'd be a treaty of some kind. And he wanted Aztlan to have a place at the trough. (To the victors—and the victors' sycophants—go the spoils, after all.)

If you ask me, Aztlan already had its beady eyes on Texas. (Used to be theirs anyway, didn't it?) And it figured the NAN might be a nice way to get it. Pavón was probably a mite pissed when all he got from the deal was the Aztlan Zone in downtown Denver.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (07:02:25/5-11-56)

>>>>>(You insist on talking like Pavón was making the decisions. It was ORO/Aztechnology that was pulling his strings, right from the start. And the STC should have recognized that!)<<<<<

—The Chromed Accountant (17:52:57/5-11-56)

Aztlan remained a member-in-good-standing of NAN until 2034, when it withdrew in protest against the meaningless squabbles that had rendered the STC ineffectual. In response—and as further indication, if one was needed, of the way the STC had deteriorated since the glory days of its achievements—the NAN drafted an official proposition censuring Aztlan for its treatment of aboriginal peoples. This charge was, of course, groundless. In fact, Aztlan was a thorn in the side of the STC because our nation stood fast to its loyalty to the Old Ways—while the other NAN nations turned aside from this high-minded struggle as soon as it became difficult to maintain.

>>>>>(Apologia to the max. Aztlan pulled out of NAN because NAN wouldn't browbeat the UCAS into giving up Texas like the Azzies wanted. Well, waah.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (15.00:36/5-16-56)

Since then, the NAN has been a constant opponent of Aztlan, decrying and attempting to block every move our nation has made to advance its culture and society.

ERA OF EXPANSION

In 2035 Aztlan took its first steps to reclaim that land to the north that rightfully belonged to its people. The preceding year, the self-styled Confederated American States had seceded from the UCAS. Now the time had come to correct the grievous wrongs that had been dealt to the peoples of Aztlan during the 19th century. The treacherous slaughter of loyal Mexican troops at San Jacinto and the lies that had been told about the Alamo for so many decades would be avenged. Aztlaner forces moved northward, driving deep into the heart of Texas.

This time the battle was a fair fight, and the results were as

they should have been the first time. Aztlaner forces routed the Texas Rangers and the Lone Star Militia and reclaimed huge expanses of land that traditionally belonged to our nation, as well as the cities of Austin and San Antonio.

>>>>>(Only partially right in the case of Austin, amigo.)<<<<<
—Diamondback (17:07:36/5-5-56)

Texas, of course, demanded military backing to cling to the land it had so long ago usurped. The remainder of the new-born CAS recognized the justice of our claim on the land, however, and refused.

>>>>>(Revisionism runs rampant. The CAS didn't back the Texans because they hadn't got their drek together after the secession. If they could have, they would have.)<<<<<
—Wallace (15:54:15/5-7-56)

In response, Texas seceded from the CAS and declared itself an independent republic. Then it turned to the UCAS, again demanding help. Once more, these demands were rightfully refused.

Meanwhile, Aztlaner representatives approached the NAN Sovereign Tribal Council, requesting support for the ongoing Texan campaign. In one of many irrational, vindictive decisions, the STC refused to aid us. The Texan campaign stalled, and soon thereafter a chastened Texas petitioned for readmission into the CAS.

>>>>>(Check this out, it's kind of interesting. The way I always learned my history, the UCAS didn't bail out Texas because it was afraid the NAN would jump to Aztlan's defense and fire up the Great Ghost Dance again. But this drek says the NAN had no love for Aztlan and wouldn't support them. If that's true, it doesn't sound likely the Dancers would have sacrificed themselves again for a country the STC didn't support. What's the clean goods?)<<<<<
—Markops (11:52:29/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Either this is a load of warm drek, or the UCAS sorely misread the NAN's intentions and attitudes. Which one's true? Toss a coin, chummer, you've got me.)<<<<<
—Auntie Social (07:12:10/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Is anyone else getting as bored of this drek as I am?)<<<<<
—Sabertooth (09:15:46/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Spoken like a true, out-there, hard-charging shadowrunner.

Ever wonder why so many of you young Turks get scragged over so often in the shadowbiz? It's because you get fragging bored of background research. Bored of the background data that might save your miserable, misbegotten hoops. You can bet the Johnsons who send you on runs know the background when they set up the contract. If you don't know it as well as they do, you're asking to get boned. And then you whimper about it. Gimme a break.

Okay, story time for you children. I was in-country in Aztlan a couple years back. To pull off my contract, I needed a "seam"—a weakness in the opposition I could exploit. Not a physical seam, like a sleeping sec guard or a hole in the cutwire fence, but a psychological one. I needed to crack an individual target—I needed to get him so pissed and cranked up he'd jump in a particular direction without thinking about the consequences. And I found it. I played on the ongoing rivalry between Aztlan and NAN. A historical fact, part of that background that bores you poor sweethearts to tears. I played on this poor slot's national pride and cultural arrogance until he jumped just the way I wanted him to, thinking all the time he was getting back at the STC for "betraying" his country. He jumped, I got the results I was looking for, and nobody could ever trace it back to me. Zero exposure, not even a single round expended. Sure, I probably could have done things the "traditional shadowrunner way," going in with guns blazing like a fragging cowboy. But the run never would have turned out so clean, and I could have gotten myself killed. Not optimum results.

So quit whining like the puppies you are. Listen and learn unless you want to provide the Azzie hardboys with a nice target for small-arms practice. Nothing slots me off quite as bad as waste. And the worst kind of waste is when young shadowwannabes throw away their lives simply because they can't be bothered to put the skull-sweat into staying alive.)<<<<<
—Argent (11:36:41/5-13-56)

The next year, an Aztlaner light-armored division moved north from staging areas near Ensenada to liberate the city of San Diego—again, territory that rightfully belonged to the Aztlan nation. This time, the Aztlaner government assumed and accepted that a request for support from the STC would be rebuffed, and simply did not bother to ask for assistance. The governor of California demanded support from the UCAS to rebuff our operations, but none was forthcoming. Once more, the UCAS government acknowledged the justice of our nation's claims.

>>>>>(Couldn't have had anything to do with the fact that California was cut off from the rest of the UCAS by the entire Pueblo, Ute, and Sioux nations, could it? No, priyatel, you've got to be right: DeeCee acknowledged that it owed you San Diego. <sneer>)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (15:06:08/5-16-56)

By 2040, Aztlan had emerged as the most stable, prosperous, and socially advanced culture in the hemisphere. To the north, internecine squabbles, secessions, and invasions were the rule. To the south, the countries of Mesoamerica grew increasingly unstable as they struggled to transform their resource-based economies to tertiary, information-based ones. During the next several years, these nations approached our government to request membership in the Aztlaner republic. Four more later, the Aztlan republic accepted its first Mesoamerican member state.

Meanwhile, the growing power of the various so-called megacorporations was beginning to threaten Aztlan's autonomy and self-determination. In a remarkable display of weakness, the UCAS and many other countries had granted these megacorporations extraterritorial status in 2001. Now these overgrown conglomerates were demanding the same treatment from Aztlan. But our government held firm against the steadily growing pressure exerted by the so-called *zaibatsu*.

By 2044, it became apparent that something had to be done. In a courageous move, the Aztlan government nationalized all foreign-owned businesses in Aztlaner territory. Some megacorporations, which had already come to *assume* the extraterritoriality they had never been granted, fielded security forces and resisted the decision of the Aztlan government. The Aztlan military quickly suppressed these scattered attempts at insurrection, however. Loyal Aztlaner-owned corporations, such as Aztechnology and Pemex, threw in their lots with the federal military.

>>>>>(Well of course Aztechnology tossed its hat into the ring and rolled out its private army. It was fragging Aztechnology that had pressured the government into the nationalization move in the first place. (Oh, by the way, this text doesn't mention it, but another president was "called home by the Plumed Serpent" about this time. She had argued that nationalization was going to open a whole drekload of creepy-crawlies. The president is dead, long live the president, and Francisco Gortari got bumped up to the hot seat.))<<<<<

—Webster (17:16:53/5-10-56)

During the years 2045 to 2047, the nations of Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua were accepted into the Aztlaner republic as member states, guaranteeing to all the peoples of those countries the same rights and privileges accorded Aztlaner citizens. In 2048, Panama also petitioned for membership and was accepted. In that same year, the Veracruz Settlement between the Aztlaner government and several of the megacorporations settled all remaining disagreements.

>>>>>(For more data about the Ensenada strike and the Veracruz Settlement, see a later section of this subfile.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:10:46/5-1-56)

The following year, the terrorist nation of Amazonia moved forces north and annexed much of Colombia and Venezuela. Both of these sovereign states called on Aztlan to help them combat the invasion. Unfortunately, the Amazonian terrorists had already captured all of Venezuela, save for the city-state of Caracas, by the time our forces could mobilize. Aztlaner troops were able to defend approximately half of Colombia from the incursion, however, in a highly successful holding action. A counterattack in early 2050 managed to reclaim at least a small portion of Venezuelan territory from the invaders, but the Aztlaner military deemed a full liberation of the entire country impossible. In 2050, the still-independent portion of Colombia petitioned for full membership in Aztlan. The petition was, of course, granted.

>>>>>(If you ask the Amazonians, they'll tell you it was Aztlan that tried to annex the whole of Colombia and Venezuela. The Amazonians claim they were forced to take over half of Colombia and most of Venezuela to stop the Aztlaner aggression.

What's the real story? Don't know, but I'd put my cred on a kind of "meeting engagement." Both countries have delusions of empire, and it's not too hard to imagine them both trying to take a bite out of the same apple at the same time.)<<<<<

—Auntie Social (07:20:57/5-9-56)

TACTICAL BRIEF: ENSENADA AND VERACRUZ

>>>>>(Here's another one that requires some explanation. If Espectro is to be believed, he (or the division running corporate security overwatch for Aztechnology) managed to liberate this from the datastores of Ares Macrotech. Its stated purpose is to provide a kind of follow-up on the Ensenada "incident" and its aftermath. As always, boys and girls, read this with the same skepticism filter through which you look at all corporate-speak.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:18:02/5-1-56)

File Header: Ares-1://html:/0202-Ensenada Operation Reciprocity
Security Link: Omega-335 10/10/48

>>>>>(I'll repeat my request from earlier in this file. Any Ares "refugees" out there who can give us a reality check on this file header structure? Is this the clean deal on "Operation Reciprocity"? And was this really an Omega Order?)<<<<<

—Jason (02:38:10/5-4-56)

>>>>>(Omega Order?)<<<<<

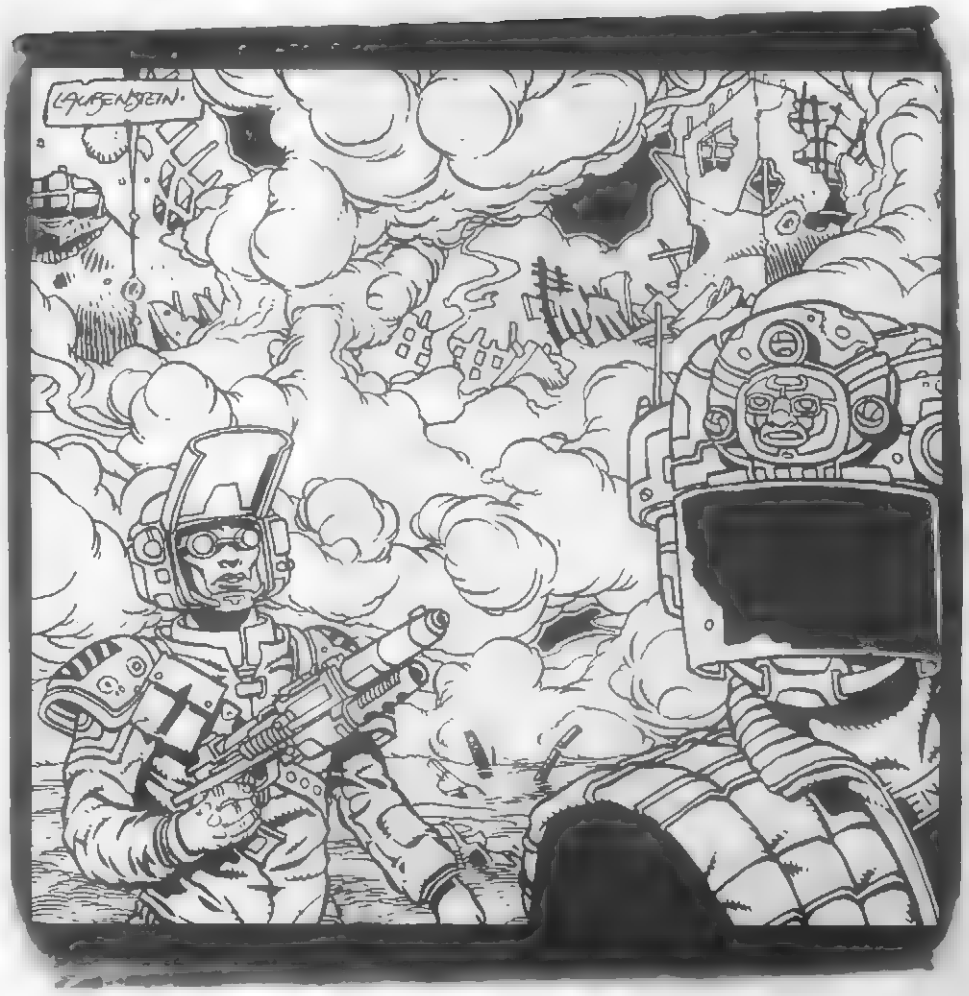
—Talbot (09:10:29/5-6-56)

>>>>>(In essence, an Omega Order constitutes the Corporate Court in Zurich-Orbital declaring open season on a corporation for any number of reasons. Check out a more complete explanation in the Corporate Shadowfiles post elsewhere on this board.)<<<<<

—Link (00:03:15/5-7-56)

OVERVIEW

Operation RECIPROCITY was a pan-corporate initiative to send a warning to Aztechnology Corporation (headquarters, Tenochtitlán; CorpFileRef A-644-b). During the four years preceding the launch of RECIPROCITY, Aztechnology—with the silent assent of the Aztlaner government—had been flouting the edicts of the Corporate Court by nationalizing the assets of the various extraterritorial multinational megacorporations operating in Aztlan. The Corporate Court had issued various official condemnations of these actions, despite the vociferous objections of the Aztechnology representative on the court. However, Aztechnology senior management ignored the court's orders to cease and desist from such actions. The court employed other avenues of approach as well, to no avail. Aztechnology staunchly defended its illegal actions and even threatened to withdraw from the Corporate Court.



>>>>>(I guess "illegal" is in the eye of the beholder. If the Aztlaner government had never granted extraterritoriality to the megas, what could the Corporate Court base their claims of "illegal corporate procedure" on?)<<<<<

—Andy L (11:58:04/5-8-56)

>>>>>(You're thinking in terms of national law, Andy. According to Aztlaner law, the megacorps had absolutely no standing. But who cares about national law? Not the megacorps, that's for damn sure. The only law that matters to them is what the Corp Court says is the law. By refusing to abide by the court's pronouncements, Aztechnology invited everything that followed. That's the corp-think on the subject, at least.)<<<<<

—Link (00:06:02/5-7-56)

In early 2048, the Corporate Court proposed the possibility of pan-corporate direct action against Aztechnology's domestic and foreign resources and assets. Aztechnology's court representative tabled a veto—based on a secondary codicil to the Court's Letters of Incorporation, which most other representatives had assumed to have expired. The challenge was referred to a judiciary council comprised of legal representatives of all corporations. Predictably, the judiciary council declared Aztechnology's veto out of order, null and void. But it had served its purpose. Aztechnology representatives had privately approached the boards of all other major megacorporations, offering Aztechnology concessions elsewhere in the world for withdrawal on the Aztlan issue.

>>>>>(In other words, "You let us play our games unhampered on our own turf, and we'll make it up to you somewhere else."

Sounds like a chill deal—until you realize it means trusting Aztechnology to hold up its end of the bargain. So what happened next is not too surprising.)<<<<<

—Link (00:09:37/5-7-56)

Many minor megacorporations accepted the offer, but few of the "triple-A" corporations—those with representation on the Corporate Court and full knowledge of Aztechnology's actions—did so.

In the mean time, Aztechnology hardened many of its assets in preparation for corporate war. ("Hardening" in this context refers primarily to financial consolidation and preparation for economic challenges, as well as bolstering systems designed to defend against tailored "war code" viruses. Physical defenses for the corporation's physical and personnel assets are maintained at a constant, high level of readiness.)

>>>>>(Don't we know it!)<<<<<
—Sidewinder (21:20:23/5-8-56)

All attempts by the Corporate Court to discuss this matter in open session were blocked by the Aztechnology representative on the court. Then in early 2048, the court took the extraordinary measure of convening an ex officio "Pan-Corporate Security Committee," comprised of representatives of all the triple-A megacorporations—save for Aztechnology itself—to explore options open to the megacorporate community. The committee declared that action was necessary to prove to Aztechnology—as an object lesson for the future—that no corporation is beyond the jurisdiction of corporate law. For the greater good of the corporate community as a whole, the committee concluded that the situation required direct action against Aztechnology.

>>>>>(God, I love a good rationalization. Rule of thumb: anytime anyone starts a sentence with "For the greater good of," run for the fragging hills, cuz they're out to get somebody.

Take this case. Why did the corps want to drek on Aztechnology? "For the greater good of" yadda yadda yadda? No. Because Aztechnology had fragging nationalized their assets—basically stolen their toys, and then told them they couldn't play in the Azzies' back yard any more.

Aztechnology cost the other megacorps big cred in lost assets and lost future profits. And by god the other corps were going to make Aztechnology pay. End of story.)<<<<<
—The Keynesian Kid (10:53:21/5-11-56)

Sending the Message

The committee's first task, of course, was to decide precisely what message should be sent and how best to deliver it. The megacorporations' quarrel was with Aztechnology, not the Aztlaner citizenry or civilian government, which limited the options somewhat—not as much as it might have in the case of another corporation, however, due to the close interrelationship between Aztechnology Corporation and the Aztlan government. Still, the committee deemed that collateral damage to Aztlan's civilian population and national (noncorporate) infrastructure would be counterproductive. Various plans were discussed, ranging from covert operations against Aztechnology resources and personnel to a direct and crippling strike on Aztechnology's headquarters itself. The committee dismissed the former option as imprecise and inefficient, for the message also had to inform Aztechnology's management that retaliation would not be of profit to the corporation. The committee developed plans for the latter option before finally discarding it because of the unavoidable collateral damage that would result from such a strike. Eventually, the Ares representative on the committee proposed a course of action that the committee deemed acceptable.

Since the Aztlaner annexation of San Diego, the coastal city of Ensenada (Ares map reference 1124.55/0332.39) had become the site of one of the largest concentrations of corporate—as opposed to corporate/national—military forces.

(Breakdowns of Aztlan/Aztechnology forces can be found in other files. For the present purposes, suffice it to say that the troop concentrations in Ensenada were almost exclusively under direct Aztechnology command. Troops in Ensenada wore Aztechnology—rather than Aztlaner—uniforms, and their combat and support vehicles were all painted in Aztechnology colors. The committee deemed this distinction to be of great psychological significance.) The committee decided that a sudden, rapid, and forceful strike on those forces would provide the most effective "message" possible.

>>>>>(Yeah, I'll buy that. Good message: "We've just messed with your fragging army. If we decide later to mess with anything else, how do you think you're going to stop us?")<<<<<

— Link (00:11:02/5-7-56)

When the planning and preparation for Operation RECIPROCITY got under way, the participating corporations were: Ares Macrotechnology, Fuchi Industrial Electronics, Mitsuhama Computer Technologies, and Saeder-Krupp Corp. Renraku Computer Systems, Shiawase Corp., and Yamatetsu Corp. provided logistical support and staging areas, though they did not contribute combat troops to the strike.

>>>>>(Man, talk about a case of "round up the usual suspects," huh?)<<<<<

—Billabong (13:31:35/5-10-56)

Under a cloak of secrecy, assets to be involved in the strike were assembled at three staging areas. Through the actions of Yamatetsu Corporation, pan-corporate seaborne assets were staged at SITE ONE. Diversionary air assets assembled at SITE TWO, while the two elements of the force that would actually accomplish the air strike staged out of SITE THREE, with extensive tanker support.

The naval assault element sailed from SITE ONE, disguised as screen vessels for a FORCE KWANTO carrier group conducting exercises in Map Sector 5137.

>>>>>(SITE ONE? Gimme a break. This drek's seven years out of date, so why keep the security so fragging tight?)<<<<<

—Billabong (13:32:56/5-10-56)

>>>>>(In case the corps want to do it again.

Took me awhile, but I managed to reconstruct how it came down. SITE ONE was Alameda, CFS—you know, the big Imperial shipyard? Somehow Yamatetsu managed to get permission for the megas to stage their ships out of the Yards there, protected from prying eyes by the Imperial Marines. And that's what the FORCE KWANTO static is about. That's obviously the Imperial Japanese Navy. And Map Sector 5137 happens to be offshore from San Diego, right on the edge of Aztlan's territorial waters.

SITE TWO—where the diversionary attack came from (a really sweet idea, that one)—was Mayagúez, Puerto Rico (Carib League). And SITE THREE was Desert Range Proving Grounds in Ute. (I guess it was Yamatetsu that arranged for a clear air corridor through CalFree airspace for the raid. Otherwise the raid birds would have gotten hammered on the way in by CFS SAMs and interceptors.))<<<<<

—Arclight (23:31:19/5-11-56)

The diversionary element launched from SITE TWO at dawn. This comprised largely high-altitude, high-speed target drones, with their transponders configured to make them appear on Aztlaner air defense systems as operational-class "penetrating" bombers. A second wave of smaller, higher-speed drones followed along at cruising speed. Long before the "bombers" reached the edge of Aztlan's territorial waters, the smaller drones accelerated to full speed and quickly pulled ahead of the slower vehicles.

Aztlaner air defense forces immediately went to alert. The phased-array radar system had picked up the "bombers" as soon as they climbed above the ground clutter, and the ground controllers brought all SAM batteries online. As expected, the controllers also assumed slower stealth fighter-bombers would be accompanying the penetrating bombers, making the invaders effectively invulnerable to ground SAM fire. The ground controllers thus scrambled almost 95 percent of Aztlan's interceptor forces, vectoring them in on the raid to defeat the stealth fighter-bombers.

>>>>>(Now this is the sweet part. What do the Azzies see on their radar screens? They see an inbound squadron of "penetrating" bombers: probably obsolete (but still lethal) B-1s and B-2s. Two-fifty klicks out, they see the bombers launch their "missiles"—actually those smaller, faster drones that suddenly kick up to full speed and pull away. Holy frag, there's a full-on military strike in progress! Who wouldn't divert all fighters to counter the threat?

And that's just what the corps wanted them to do.)<<<<<

—Arclight (23:36:58/5-11-56)

As a "natural" response to Aztechnology bringing defensive systems online, FORCE KWANTO triggered its own defensive jammers and turned for home at flank speed. Meanwhile, the corporate assault element—under cover of the jamming—turned southeast and made its run for Ensenada.

Simultaneously, the air strike element from SITE THREE was turning southwest, following a protected corridor through KWANTO airspace. By the time it entered Aztlaner airspace, almost all air defenses had been stripped away to meet the "bomber strike" inbound from the east.

The first air strike element comprised reduced-signature ground-attack warplanes, supplemented by jammer and Wild Weasel SAM-killers. Aztlaner ground-based antiair assets inflicted casualties on the inbound raid, but losses were kept to an acceptable 15 percent of the strike element. By the time the Aztlaner interceptor force realized it had been responding to drones rather than bombers, the first strike element had inflicted heavy damage on the Ensenada base and was already withdrawing. The second element from SITE THREE was now

inbound, 30 minutes from Aztlaner airspace.

The seaborne strike force came within range and launched its missiles. (This strike element had the capability for a land assault should damage assessments indicate it necessary. As it turned out, this was not necessary.) All of the missiles (within acceptable tolerances) landed inside the Ensenada military base. Now the strike force reversed course and headed north into KWANTO territorial waters.

Aztlaner air assets, diverted back from the diversionary raid, would soon be on station to attack the retreating naval strike force. They were, however, intercepted and forced to break off by the second air element, comprised of signature-reduced air superiority fighters. The Aztlaner fighters were low on fuel, and many had already expended their missiles on the inbound drones. As a result, the second corporate air element suffered no casualties.

>>>>>(A really choice combined-arms operation, that one. ("Body blow, body blow, uppercut, knock the bum out!") Just goes to show how much damage the megacorps can do if they put their minds to it.)<<<<<

—Arclight (23:40:01/5-11-56)

>>>>>(I want to go back to that "within acceptable tolerances" comment. Didn't something like five missiles hit residential areas in Ensenada itself? Didn't they incinerate a couple hundred people? What's all this drek about limiting "collateral damage" then?)<<<<<

—Post Haste (18:14:15/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Azzie propaganda, maybe? At least partially. Objective observers recorded only one missile strike outside the base area. An inbound Saeder-Krupp Phantom IV Wild Weasel did crash in a residential area, though, when it ate a heat-seeker. There were collateral casualties. But they were kept surprisingly low. Good planning, excellent execution.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (20.42.59/5-12-56)

After-Action Evaluation

By operational measures, Operation RECIPROCITY was a sterling success. Losses among the strike forces were well within acceptable limits, and damage assessments showed almost precisely the degree of damage that planners had expected. The only imponderable at the time was Aztlan/Aztechnology's response.

And the response was heated, as expected. The damage inflicted on the Ensenada complex was not severe in overall terms. The military capability of the site had been degraded by only approximately 10 percent. Still, destruction of the Ensenada complex as a capable fighting force had not been the purpose of Operation RECIPROCITY. The message had been sent as clearly as possible that the pan-corporate forces *could* have done much more.

Still, emotions within the Aztlaner government and Aztechnology management ran high—high enough, possibly, to overcome reason and rationality. As Aztlan/Aztechnology spokespeople threatened overwhelming retaliation, a covert communiqué from Ares senior management was delivered to Aztechnology Corporation's Tenochtitlán headquarters. Ares's willingness to activate Operation Big Gun against the Ensenada complex was laid out in no uncertain terms with a deadline of 72 hours.

Twelve hours before this deadline expired, Aztechnology capitulated to the pan-corporate demands. The Veracruz Settlement was the result.

>>>>>(Okay, now. What the frag was Big Gun? I've heard rumors it was a nuke. What's the gen on this?)<<<<<
—Mondo Esto (03:42:04/5-12-56)

>>>>>(We've already hashed that out, haven't we? Maybe Big Gun was a nuke—or something else. My guess it was a Thor shot. You know, simple guided projectiles hanging around in orbit waiting for a satellite signal telling them to re-enter the atmosphere and crush a specific target with what amounts to pure kinetic energy. Ares had access to 'em first, and probably still has the most.)<<<<<
—Webster (20:57:05/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Okay, kids, take this drek to the Conspiracies SIG.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (21:17:49/5-12-56)

THE VERACRUZ SETTLEMENT

Analysts still debate whether the Veracruz Settlement was the optimal result the court could have achieved from Operation RECIPROCITY. The settlement obtained, however, was deemed satisfactory by the Pan-Corporate Security Committee. The exact details of the Veracruz Settlement are still kept under tight security (Ares access OVERLORD-1 required). However, the overall intent of the settlement is public knowledge.

Under the Veracruz Settlement, Aztlan/Aztechnology paid direct compensation to all corporations whose assets had been nationalized during the previous four years. (The credit transfers involved were confidential.) Above and beyond that, other megacorporations would henceforth be allowed to do business in Aztlan, but only indirectly. Megacorporations could establish local subsidiaries, provided that major shareholders be Aztlaner citizens or majority-owned Aztlaner corporations. (In the majority of cases, the "major shareholder" was the Aztlaner government itself.) "Major," in this context, implies that the Aztlaner element must be the largest single shareholder—not necessarily that it have voting control of the subsidiary. (An "arms-length" relationship would have to be maintained between other shareholders to prevent them from classing their shares together and thus invalidating the subsidiary's charter to operate in Aztlan.)

>>>>>(It didn't make the newsfaxes, but two years back Mitsuhama lost one of its Aztlaner subsidiaries—Chalco Computer Systems—under this condition of the Veracruz Settlement. The way it shook out, Chalco had three major shareholders: the Aztlan government (40 percent), MCT North America (22 percent), and an outfit called HybriData (20 percent). The remaining shares were held by various odds and sods, none of whom owned more than about 1 percent of outstanding shares. Then evidence came to light that HybriData was a shell company owned indirectly by MCT Australasia. Aztlan appealed to the Corporate Court, which ruled that MCT NA and HybriData weren't "at arm's length." Chalco lost its license to do business, and Aztechnology bought up its assets at 5 cents on the dollar. Needless to say, MCT was pissed.)<<<<<
—Nuyen Nick (07:15:45/5-3-56)

>>>>>(Now you know why Aztechnology doesn't get on so well with the other megacorps. And why the Azzies have a love-hate relationship with the Carib League. And why Aztlan hates Ute and CalFree.)<<<<<
—Largo (14:26:09/5-9-56)

>>>>>(And like I said earlier, if you're planning on running in Aztlan, get to know this drek. Seven years isn't long, not as the megacorps view things. To them, the Veracruz Settlement was just yesterday, and it's still a festering sore, both for Aztechnology and for those corps (Ares, probably, for one) who thought they should have shaken Aztlan down for more.

Can you use this kind of thing to your advantage? Damn straight you can, if you've got a brain in your head. And don't make the mistake of thinking the Johnson who hires you doesn't know this drek and hasn't included it in his plans. Frag me blind, I've heard of whole shadowruns that revolved around some of this history. And the only way the runners survived—if they did—was by understanding the dynamics.

Okay, okay, end of fragging sermon.)<<<<<
—Argent (11:40:18/5-13-56)

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Interesting, how quiet most of you were during this part.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Of course. Those of us who cared to listen at the time remember it so clearly.

:::::[UMSONDO] Some had matters of graver import to observe.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] <sigh> Shall we proceed?

AZTECHNOLOGY

>>>>>(Espectro pulled together quite a mishmash of files here to give us a nice, comprehensive picture of how the Big Pyramid works, beginning with another document allegedly scooped from Ares Macrotechnologies. So you can all stop whining about the dirt that was missing from **Corporate Shadowfiles**, okay?

Again, assuming that our source was sending us a message in the arrangement of the files about Aztlan, we left this set of documents where it was when we decompressed the download. For those of you not paying close attention, Espectro's offering indicates that the circumstances of the Yucatán civil war, the history of Aztlan's formation, and the workings of Aztechnology (followed closely by religion and magic) represent the most important elements of the nation of Aztlan—and therefore represent the information runners and others most need to know to survive in this unique and frightening place.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:30:02/5-1-56)

File Header: Ares-5://html:/1504-Aztechnology Corporate Background
Security Link: Able-644-b 1/30/54

AZTECHNOLOGY CORPORATION

Home Office Location: Tenochtitlán, Aztlan
President/CEO: Juan Atzcapotzalco
Corporate Status: Private
Chief Products/Services: Chemicals, heavy industry, military technology, mystical goods/services
Secondary Interests: Aerospace, biotechnology, consumer goods, cybernetics, service
Security/Military Forces: Aztechnology Corporate Security

Information on its rivals is of vital importance to a megacorporation, particularly where rivalries are not limited to market competition. Aztechnology Corporation represents a major rival and even an enemy to Ares Macrotechnologies, and hence warrants close attention.

This report provides new Ares management personnel with an overview of Aztechnology Corporation. It is not intended to be an exhaustive analysis of the corporation's background, organization, assets, capabilities or market position. Managers who need to acquire more in-depth information should consult various subdocuments and related files; data crosslinks for those files are provided in each major section of this analysis.

The information in this report is considered **Ares proprietary** and classed as Security Grouping Bravo. Appropriate security provisions must be observed at all times. Inappropriate dissemination of this document, related subdocuments or data crosslinks is **strictly prohibited.** Security lapses will be considered infractions of Ares Macrotechnologies Security Provisions, section M-12, subsection A-13, paragraph 13.5.2.1.

>>>>>(Ooh, does that mean Espectro's committed a spanking offense?)<<<<<

—Dilbert (12:15:12/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Chummers, Ares and most other megacorps consider disseminating proprietary information an act of commercial/industrial espionage. Megacorps treat comm/ind espionage much as countries treat military espionage. In other words, "Would you like a blindfold, Mr. Suit?")<<<<<

—Artemis (09:36:39/5-9-56)

HISTORY

Like nation-states, the world view and behaviors of megacorporations are strongly influenced by the paths by which they reached pre-eminence in the business/commercial world. This is particularly true of Aztechnology Corporation. Though the name "Aztechnology" does not appear until 2020, the history of Aztechnology Corporation dates back to well before the Awakening.

CARTELS

Aztechnology began within the various drug cartels that operated largely out of Colombia, and later Panama and Nicaragua, in the late 20th century. The cartels were involved in various business concerns from the 1970s through the 1990s, and then once more around the turn of the century after a temporary downturn in their business fortunes. The Medellín cartel led the group during the 1980s, giving way to the Cali cartel in the 1990s. After the Cali cartel's influence diminished as a result of various factors (data crosslink /html:/Cali-10335), the Medellín faction regained ascendancy.

In the preceding paragraph, the word "faction" is used advisedly. Though the cartels occasionally worked together, as in their response to the enhanced "War on Drugs" staged by the United States in the late 1990s, they spent most of their time in direct and often violent competition with each other.

>>>>>(Sounds like the megacorps today, neh?)<<<<<

—Larkspur (16:08:24/5-9-56)

During the early years of the 21st century, the Cali cartel regained some of its lost power, but it failed to overtake the rapidly growing Medellín concern. Two new major cartels had also risen to prominence in the interim: one based in Masaya (Nicaragua), the other in David (Panama, near the Costa Rican border). The Medellín cartel led the pack; the Cali, Masaya and David cartels formed the "B-list" concerns. (See data crosslink /html:/Cartel-09428.)

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, the drug cartels accrued huge profits from their illicit trade, often with the cognizance of their governments and sometimes with their direct cooperation.

>>>>>(Thanks in part to the "War on Drugs." You know, if I'd wanted to jack up the revenue of the cartels, I couldn't have come up with a better scam than that one. Sure, interdiction and infiltration took out drug couriers and the occasional coca-processing facility, but its major achievement was to jack the street price of coke, crack, and their follow-ons through the roof.)<<<<<

—DNF (16:25:09/5-11-56)

Before the turn of the century, the "drug lords"—or "cartel managers," as they came to be called in Aztlan/Aztechnology records—were struggling to find legitimate places to invest their drug revenue. Contrary to popular belief, the need to "launder" these funds was a minor motivating factor; the cooperation of various governments in the region made such complex tactics largely unnecessary. The major reason was much simpler; the revenues amounted to much more money than even the high-living drug lords could ever spend. The cartels therefore strove to "go legitimate" to some degree, while maintaining their major business (data crosslink /html:/Cartel-09378).

In 2007, Juan Ortega, the *jefe* ("chief") of the Medellín cartel, managed to coordinate under his direction the various cartels' efforts to invest in legitimate business. His success also allowed him to cement his position as the de facto overall leader of the Mesoamerican drug trade. In 2007, the major cartels bought out a major resource development company based in Villahermosa, Mexico, and renamed it ORO Corporation. Though the word *oro* means "gold," the name actually derives from the initials of the three major cartel leaders responsible for establishing and managing it: Ortega (Medellín), Julio Ramos (David), and Diego Oriz (Masaya).

In the following year, huge deposits of the strategically important metal molybdenum were found several kilometers off the Panamanian coast in the Golfo de los Mosquitos north of San Cristóbal. The value of the mineralogical find was estimated initially in the tens of billions of U.S. dollars, but this estimate quickly proved conservative. "Coincidentally," only ORO Corporation had exploitation rights, acquired from the Panamanian government months before the deposits were discovered. Further, in the months preceding the find ORO had acquired, squeezed out, or otherwise compromised all of the local companies that supplied the equipment and material necessary to exploit the deposits. The corporation had made similar "arrangements" with the downstream companies as well, those who would process the molybdenum ore taken from the shallow continental shelf. (See data crosslink /html:/ORO-06564.)

It seemed obvious at the time that ORO Corporation had some prior knowledge of the find and had manipulated events to maximize its profits from the circumstance. Nevertheless, no one could prove chicanery on the corporation's part. In any case, legal jurisdiction over the matter belonged to Panama, a nation that stood to gain spectacularly from ORO's fortunes. This single event catapulted ORO Corporation from obscurity into the "major leagues" of industry.

>>>>>(You mean to tell me if it wasn't for a drekpot-load of molly-be-damned, we wouldn't be sweating Aztechnology today?)<<<<<

—London (11:17:14/5-6-56)

>>>>>(That find just made it easier. Without the molly, ORO would have found some other way to carve out its fortune. (Frag, if you included all the drug cartels' revenues in the figures, ORO and its little friends slated an annual revenue higher than the GNP of many Euro-states.))<<<<<

—The Chromed Accountant (13:56:25/5-6-56)

ORO AND TECHNOPIRACY

At the urgings of ORO Corporation and its "affiliates" the cartels, several countries in the region pulled out of many international agreements concerning copyright, trade secret, patent ,and intellectual property protection. Within Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua and (to a large degree) Honduras, it was no longer illegal to copy, repackage, disassemble and/or re-engineer software products of all classifications. Local companies, by this time having become subsidiaries or partners of ORO Corporation, began to "pirate" and sell computer application code, computer/video/trideo games, "e-pubs" (electronic publications), trideo and music programming and (later) simsense recordings. Because these companies did not have to invest in development, they could drastically undercut the official world prices for these products while still turning an immense profit (data crosslink /html:/Pirate-23442).

By the time ORO and its affiliates took up technopiracy, countries in the Mesoamerican region stood among the few in the world that still refused to accept the logical necessity and wisdom of megacorporate extraterritoriality. In the countries under ORO's corporate thumb, megacorporations hurt by technopiracy had little recourse. ORO management refused to listen to reason and back away from the corporation's dangerous course. National governments and justice systems complied fully with ORO's interests. Consumers the world over were shortsightedly swayed by the much lower prices of ORO's pirated wares. Other nation-states, even those with the vision to accept extraterritoriality, were unwilling or unable to prevent their citizens from buying these pirated products. ORO's revenues skyrocketed once more.

>>>>>(Don't you just love the pro-corporate cant? Consumers were "shortsightedly swayed" by low prices. Interesting interpretation, neh?)<<<<<

—Scooter (04:16:45/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Why didn't the megacorps just come in and kick ORO's sorry ass? That's what they'd do today, count on it.)<<<<<

—Digital Assassin (15:26:06/5-11-56)

>>>>>(That was then; this is now. The megas had just recently become extraterritorial; they had their own private security forces, but those forces weren't yet full-fledged private armies. Even working together, I can't believe all the megacorps in 2008 could have kicked ORO's sorry ass in any way, shape, or form. Remember, ORO had whole countries onside. Presumably those countries would have defended ORO's interests militarily, if it had come to that, because those interests aligned with their own (read: made them gobs of cred). Panama, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Honduras were small countries, but at the time their armies were far and away bigger than anything the megas could field. Today's another story.)<<<<<

—Doc (09:44:18/5-12-56)

During the mass chaos that attended the so-called Awakening, ORO Corporation expanded its technopiracy operations into other countries in Mesoamerica, subverting national governments in the process. Soon the cartels had acquired considerable influence over the governments of Costa Rica, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Colombia, and Venezuela.

>>>>>(Hey, they missed Belize.)<<<<<

—Tarquin (06:25:09/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Oh boy, you're right. ORO fragged up big-time—missed the perfect chance to corner the influential banana-and-sport-diving market segment!

Think about what you're saying, chum.)<<<<<

—Josh (14:15:01/5-12-56)

>>>>>(They have Belize now. Check out the background info about Aztlan in this download.)<<<<<

—Doc (14:31:02/5-12-56)

ORO's enlarged technopiracy operations provided a major incentive for the formation in 2012 of the Inter-Corporate Council, which eventually became the Corporate Court. Initial incarnations of the ICC did not include ORO. Member corporations soon recognized, however, that despite ORO's distasteful business practices, the corp was too large and influential to keep out of the council.

>>>>>(Rather like keeping the USSR out of the United Nations back when that august body was formed.)<<<<<

—Webster (10:27:45/5-10-56)

>>>>>(The other major history of this period I read—on Shadowland, of course, in Corporate Shadowfiles, virtual page 96-97—didn't mention Aztechnology (oops, ORO) having anything to do with the formation of the ICC. The shadowfiles claim the ICC was a response to the scorched-earth corp-war between BMW (which later spawned Saeder-Krupp) and Keruba (which got absorbed by Renraku). So which is right? I figure they both are; they're just telling the part of the story that supports their central point.)<<<<<

—Doc (09:08:11/5-12-56)

Somewhat predictably, the ICC failed to rein in ORO's irresponsible actions. In 2013, Keruba—at the time primarily a software company and a prime victim of ORO's technopiracy—initiated several minor raids against ORO's resources to "send a message" to the corporation's management. ORO answered the raids with larger operations, and the situation soon escalated into corporate war. The ICC tried to settle the situation by applying pressure to ORO, as the sympathies of the other megacorporate representatives on the council lay with Keruba, but had no measurable success. Eventually, the conflict wore down as both corporations expended their liquid assets.

FORMATION OF AZTECHNOLOGY

The events of the 21st century's second decade transformed ORO from a renegade into a respectable partner of a brand-new national government. By 2015, ORO had acquired a measure of respectability through its humanitarian efforts after the VITAS plague swept Mexico. This, along with its unstinting work to establish a direct-democracy system after the fall of the Mexican government, raised ORO's ethical stock in many eyes.

>>>>>(Now we see how the corporate system works, neh? Ares hates Aztechnology—or ORO or whatever the frag you want to call it—but all megacorps will close ranks to protect their own.)<<<<<

—Davis (11:06:09/5-8-56)

>>>>>(You're right, of course, megacorps do close ranks. But that's not entirely what's going on here. By 2015, ORO was just too fragging big to knock off. Any "respectability" the corp acquired was merely by default. The other megas figured, "We can't take ORO down, so we've got to live with it." ORO was just too successful to demonize any longer.

Sir John Harington said it best: "Treason doth never prosper, what's the reason?/For if it prosper none dare call it Treason.")<<<<<

—Webster (18:28:13/5-8-56)

The joint venture between ORO and the government of the new nation of Aztlan gave the corporation access to and some degree of control over a large market. In response to the relative stability of the new Aztlan government (by comparison with other Mesoamerican nations), ORO moved its central management structure to Mexico City (recently renamed Tenochtitlán). In 2022, ORO Corporation renamed itself Aztechnology Corporation. This name change coincided with a huge "image re-engineering" project, a public relations campaign of epic scope. The corporation spent countless billions of pesos to recast itself as a new organization, completely different from the technopirates who had terrorized the high-tech markets only a decade before. Remarkably, and counter to the predictions of many corporate analysts, this campaign worked among noncorporate consumers. Corporate insiders knew better, of course; the jaguar named Aztechnology might have changed its spots, but it remained the same predatory beast beneath the pelt.

>>>>>(Oooh, similes ...)<<<<<

—Bung (09:13:46/5-10-56)

In the two decades that followed, Aztechnology moved to the forefront of Aztlan's expansion. Aztechnology "security forces" fought alongside Aztlan's national troops in the northern campaigns that struck into Texas and "liberated" San Diego. Aztechnology also played a major role in Aztlan's ongoing campaign to compromise the national governments of the countries to the south—incidentally, the countries with which ORO had struck its "sweetheart deals." (Predictably, the campaign to compromise these countries went exceptionally smoothly.)

>>>>>(Translation: ORO/Aztechnology already had its hooks deep into the governments—already had people on the payroll, already knew where the bodies were buried, already had the blackmail programs in place. With that kind of groundwork, didn't take much effort to flip those governments right over when the moment came.)<<<<<

—Mink (11:37:01/5-8-56)

CORPORATE CONFLICT

Aztechnology came into conflict with the rest of the megacorporate sphere again in 2044 when the Aztlan government, acting on the corporation's direct instructions, nationalized all holdings belonging to other megacorporations operating in the nation. Negotiations in which the Corporate Court and individual megacorporations repeatedly and forcefully pointed out the consequences of this action failed to have any effect. In 2048, a coalition of megacorporations organized Operation RECIPROCITY, a paramilitary strike on Aztechnology's Ensenada facilities, with the full knowledge and approval of the Corporate Court. (Data crosslink /html:/O-335, security level Ares-3).

>>>>>(In case you missed the connection, this data crosslink references the document "Tactical Brief: Ensenada and Veracruz" which appeared earlier in this post.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:33:00/5-1-56)

Details of Operation RECIPROCITY are classified, as are the detailed negotiations that followed it. The result, of course, is well-known; the megacorporations signed the Veracruz Settlement in 2048. An overview of the settlement's provisions may be found via the crosslink listed above. Detailed discussions of the settlement are classified under Ares access Overlord-1.

Though the Veracruz settlement loosened Aztechnology's grip somewhat on the economy of the Mesoamerican region, its current hold remains tight. With its close ties to the Aztlan government and the conditions of the settlement that require Aztlan (and often Aztechnology) to be a major shareholder in all foreign corporations, Aztechnology Corporation continues to be a major force to be reckoned with.

CORPORATE COURT

AZTECHNOLOGY AND THE AZTLAN GOVERNMENT

File Identifier: Archive 11034-2156-011

Cross-references: 11034-2156-012, -013, -014
11034-2158-223 and subsequent
11034-2242-001 and subsequent
11047-1649-042

Security Indices: CC-001 [[Not for General Distribution]]
CC-xAZ [[Not for Release to **Aztechnology**]]

Though in most cases it is not necessary to distinguish between Aztechnology Corporation and the sovereign Aztlan government—the links between corporation and government are so tight that the Aztlan national government functions as a division of Aztechnology—under some circumstances such a distinction is desirable. Other documents describe the development of this close association between these two entities. The reader of this report should understand how the status quo is maintained.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

TECHNIQUES OF CONTROL

Aztechnology uses a number of familiar and effective techniques to maintain and strengthen its hold over Aztlan's civilian government.

Technical Means

ORO Corporation established the computer system that handles Aztlan's elections and plebiscites. Today, Aztechnology owns, maintains, and controls this system, and through it the entire electoral process. Elected officials who fail to toe the Aztechnology line will be unseated in the next election. If the circumstances warrant, a "recall" provision in the country's constitution allows for a special election to be called to challenge an incumbent even in midterm. As the "electronic petition" that begins the recall process is also controlled by the electoral system, Aztechnology can easily bring this pressure to bear on errant national leaders.

Economic Means

Not all members of the Aztlaner government are elected. Most are "career" bureaucrats, appointed or hired. These individuals' tenure with the government averages 17 years. After they leave government service, they often find higher-paying positions in the so-called private sector. Predictably, many of these jobs are with Aztechnology.

Also predictably, many individuals in government service begin positioning themselves for eventual employment with Aztechnology before they leave public office. They provide confidential information to Aztechnology to prove that they are "in the loop" on important decisions, or they take some direct action to benefit their hoped-for employer. On leaving government service, an average of 35 percent of senior civil servants actually go to work for Aztechnology, typically as consultants.

>>>>>(So there's pretty fragging hot competition between the wannabes, right? I mean frag, think about it. What's your average political appointee pull in a year? Seventy thousand nuyen, tops, maybe less. How much does an Azzie "consultant" earn? Six figures at least. These slags'll do whatever it takes to get that consulting job, huh?)<<<<<

—Cook (23:15:56/5-01-56)

>>>>>(A government bought and sold by a corp. It's enough to make me nostalgic for the good old days, when the private and public Powers That Be weren't so fragging hand-in-glove. Back then, the worst we had to worry about was garden-variety demagogues and incompetents.)<<<<<

—Liberty Belle (11:32:45/5-03-56)

>>>>>(Libby, Libby, you're so naive. Sure, the Azzie government's "bought and sold" because it jobs a lot of drek out to Aztechnology—contract work of all shapes, sizes, and flavors. But what's so new about that? Where do you think the old U.S. government would have been if it hadn't contracted out heavy-duty technical computation to TRW and other big corps? And frag, even before the end of the past century some places were contracting out law enforcement, education, and even the fragging jails to private companies. Okay, maybe Aztlan's taken it a little further than most. While lots of UCAS cities have contracted out policing to Lone Star and similar outfits, at least the UCAS maintains its own military. But that difference is just one of degree, not of kind, neh? So the government runs the country, and that's all she wrote. The government is just trying to save the poor taxpayer a few pesos by contracting out key services to an outfit that's got the resources to fulfill those services better and more efficiently than the government itself.)<<<<<

—Newt II (15:04:56/5-03-56)

>>>>>(Whoa. Lesson time.

Newtie boy, Aztechnology and the Azzie government have put a lot of energy into making it look just the way you scanned it. So what's the clean deal, you ask? I'll give you my scan on it. (If anybody else parses it differently, jump on in. I haven't had a good online argument in a long time.)

The real power, in the long term, lies with Aztechnology. Like it says in this Corp Court screed, Aztechnology controls the electoral process. Think about that, chummers. The gnome-priests (that's what I call the little techno-ciphers who worship at the Big A's datacores) control who sits in the presidential office, who gets to play in the senate, who gets into fistfights in the Chamber of Deputies. Any candidate who doesn't please Aztechnology just ain't gonna get the votes, end of line.

Everyone who matters knows that. The Azatlán Party knows it. The guy sitting in the presidential office knows it. Maybe the local yokels scrapping it up in the Chamber of Deputies don't know it, but who gives a flying frag about them anyway?

Socratic method time. What's the central purpose of an elected politician? Three ... two ... one ... buzzzz. Sorry, the correct answer is re-election (so you don't win this gracious dining room suite after all, you flake). When your re-election hopes are firmly in the tight grasp of Aztechnology, are you going to do something to piss off your benefactors? I'm waiting

Even if you (gasp!) don't care about re-election, you're still under the Big A's thumb. Even if Azzie dirty-tricks squads don't arrange for the Plumed Serpent to call you home prematurely, you know just how much grief Aztechnology can cause your part of the government. Hey, chummer, they'll just withdraw some or all of their services—military, policing, data processing, intelligence-gathering, processing the governmental payroll. Get the point?

Those two levers give them the handle on any politician. If you're a typical self-serving scumbuzzard, Aztechnology can arrange for you to go back to picking squashes or sexually harassing law students or whatever it was you did before entering a career of public service. If you're the one-in-a-million honest public servant who really cares, the threat's so much worse—Aztechnology can hurt the entire country.

That's the scoop as this babe sees it. Aztechnology and the Aztlaner government are distinct entities—just as a hammer and a nail are distinct entities. (And with much the same relationship.)

Any questions?)<<<<<

—Hidalgo (10:54:38/5-04-56)

>>>>>(Er, no, honestly. I couldn't have put it more succinctly myself.)<<<<<

—Doc (10:48:05/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, but aren't a drekload of Azatlán Party members Aztechnology employees?)<<<<<

—Jervis (18:43:15/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Forgot to mention that bit, didn't I? Yes. There isn't what you'd call an arm's-length separation between the Azatlán Party and Aztechnology. But that's not so weird or hinky, as long as the Azatlán Party's candidates aren't senior employees of Aztechnology at the time of their nominations. (They never are—by design.) Otherwise, what's the hash? It's like kvetching because UAW members are card-carrying Democrats, or because TRW datapushers are dues-paying members of the Technocratic Party in the UCAS. Honto?)<<<<<

—Hidalgo (23:47:47/5-10-56)

Indirect and Direct Personal Means

Though it has yet to be categorically proven, evidence supports the contention that Aztechnology has "personal leverage" over a large number of Aztlan government officials at all levels in both the executive and legislative branches. In key cases, evidence suggests that indirect personal leverage supplements other means of control.

>>>>>(Dontcha just loooove bureaucratic double-speak? "Indirect personal leverage," my rosy red hind end. Blackmail, chummers, that's what it means. Extortion. "Do what we tell you, or we'll publicly post those photographs of you and the sheep." Or "Play ball, or we'll shoot your dog.")<<<<<

—Jezz (14:04:21/5-9-56)

Aztechnology's relatively high proportion of magically adept employees makes direct personal control a particularly attractive choice for the corporation. The most common form of direct personal control is mind-controlling spells. If used correctly and quickened to become part of the subject's aura, these spells can be hard to detect and even harder to counteract. Forms of brainwashing and non-magical behavior-modification techniques (refer to file cross-reference Manchurian Candidate) are also effective, though they tend to take longer to bring into play.

Some tentative evidence exists that certain forms of spirits can directly control, even "possess," an individual. For obvious reasons, such spirits would make a powerful tool for controlling a politician.

>>>>>(Blood spirits, chummer. Them things can possess you. Rip your soul out through your ears and wear your body like a fragging suit of clothes.)<<<<<

—I Ching (11:52:35/5-8-56)

A high-risk/high-return technique is to sanction the individual to be controlled and then use magic to maintain the illusion that the subject is still alive. The high return comes from the fact that the mage or shaman conducting the project has total control over every aspect of the subject's behavior. The high risk comes from the potentially devastating consequences if the deception is exposed.

>>>>>(No drek. "Oh my god, the president's a zombie ... !" Bad for national morale, I'd say.)<<<<<

—Carmen (14:15:43/5-7-56)

Reports have suggested that this technique is being used within Aztechnology, specifically in the case of Juan Atzcapotzalco.

>>>>>(I'm fragging telling you, Atzcapotzalco's the walking dead! I've posted this before, but no one takes me seriously!)<<<<<

—Rat Dancer (23:32:17/5-8-56)

Further investigation, however, has shown these reports to be unsubstantiated.

>>>>>(And I'm fragging telling you, no fragging way! Unsubstantiated, just like the man says!)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (09:25:15/5-9-56)

CORPORATE STRUCTURE

>>>>>(Espectro didn't see fit to give us any dirt on this topic. Maybe he's got personal reasons for holding out on certain topics. Maybe he thought it was general knowledge and thus not worthy of revisiting. Your call. Anyhow, I whistled up help from my old chummer Pyramid Watcher, who already should be well-known to many of you. He's written all the stuff on corp structure. Enjoy!)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:37:12/5-1-56)

>>>>>(So you suspect that maybe—just maybe—this slag Espectro has a hidden agenda for this whole scam? Well golly gee gosh darn who'd of thunk it? <sneer>)<<<<<

—T-Rex (00:25:14/5-6-56)

Okay, chums, hold onto your hoops. Welcome to a brief whirlwind guided tour of the corporate monolith that is Aztechnology Corporation.

MAJOR DIVISIONS

If you've scanned the e-doc listed as **Corporate Shadowfiles** on the Shadowland menu (and if not, *why* not?), then you've seen bits and pieces of this part of this post before. It may seem like a gratuitous trip down memory lane, but it gives you the perspective you've gotta have to understand the new stuff I'll throw at you a little later.

The first level of the Big A's organization is set up along continental lines. The Big A has six primary divisions: North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australasia. Operations in Aztlan are part of the North American division (which gives an interesting insight into the way Aztechnology thinks of itself). The Tenochtitlán headquarters houses the brain trust of the entire corp, so organizationally speaking it's "above and beyond" divisional boundaries. Biz still gets done out of the HQ pyramid, however, and all profit-and-loss activities are posted to the North American division's books.

People often ask which of these divisions is the biggest. (You guys want to know that too, right?) I can only answer that it depends on how you define "biggest." Most employees? North America, hands down. Most subsidiary companies? Europe. Most revenue? North America again. Highest profit? South America (surprised the frag out of me). Highest rate of growth? Asia. Pick the measure that gives you the answer you want.

>>>>>("Biggest" also depends on where you draw the line between Aztechnology and not-Aztechnology. Wholly owned subsidiaries? Sure, they're part of Aztechnology. Other subsidiaries where Aztechnology is a major shareholder? How major? See what I mean?

Different divisions handle things differently. Take Az-NA. Kinda monolithic, right? The vast majority of operations mounted under the Azzie-North America banner have the Aztechnology logo plastered on them. Az-Australasia's quite different. That division's more like a holding company for a drekload of subsidiaries. Financially there's not that much difference: all the cred ends up in the Big A's coffers. But down in Australasia, almost nothing has the Aztechnology logo slapped on it beyond the actual divisional HQ.)<<<<<

—The Chromed Accountant (12:52:17/5-9-56)

These six big divisions are subdivided geographically. For example, the NA division comprises Northwest, Northeast, Central, Southwest, Gulf of Mexico, and Aztlan.

>>>>>(Few years back, right here on Shadowland, I scanned some reference to a "Vice President of Northern Hemisphere Operations." Rivera, his name was. What gives?)<<<<<

—JoyToy (10:50:25/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, I saw the same thing. That's an obsolete reference JT, end of story. The Big A has "rationalized" its management structure since 2050 when that reference was posted. "Northern Hemisphere" is just too fragging big for any one suit to manage.)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (13:45:18/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Not precisely true. Though it doesn't appear on the official org-charts, Aztech has a level of bureaucracy above the divisional. The senior management team—as I explain later in the file—includes a drekpot-load of senior executive vice presidents and the like. Some of them have unofficial oversight over larger regions than the divisions. Like JoyToy said, there's a senior exec veep who oversees "northern hemisphere operations." That's not his/her/its formal title, but it's the way things actually work.

Rivera's O-U-T, by the way. All the way out—killed in a chopper crash last year.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (09:13:48/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Rivera was hit.)<<<<<

—Strauss (12:11:42/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Of course Rivera was hit, you twink. Problem is, nobody knows who did it. Rivera had a list of personal enemies longer than my johnson, and any one of them would have gutted his own mother for a shot at Rivera.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (10:25:29/5-15-56)

MAJOR WHOLLY OWNED SUBSIDIARIES

As ORO/Aztechnology grew, it bought out as many influential Mexican/Aztlan corporations as it could. Major corps under the Aztechnology "umbrella," wholly owned by the Big A even though that fact might be hidden to some degree or another, include Pemex (*Petroleos Mexicanos*, the national petrochem industry), Televisa (the central broadcast/narrowcast media conglomerate), and BANCOMEXT (*Banco Nacional de Comercio Exterior;* National Foreign Trade Bank).

>>>>>(Hoi. I been scanning this drek, and I finally figured out Espectro also didn't have nothing to say about emergency medical coverage. Aztlan's got its own version of DocWagon; it's called MediCarro ("Doc Car") and it's another wholly owned subsidiary of the Big A. DocWagon manages it, but the Az-boys own it. (MediCarro came in "under the radar," like. Major Aztlan/Aztechnology ownership, but it's really like a DocWagon branch office.)

Key issues: Yes, your DocWagon coverage is good down here. Services are more or less what you get back home, except for the 10-minute maximum response time. (MediCarro will probably get to you in 10 minutes or less if you're in a major urban area. If they don't, tough teat.)

MediCarro is run like your typical DocWagon franchise, 'cause that's what it is. Really, right the way down to the different vehicles and the gear they pack around. Want more data on that drek? Check out the file called Neo-Anarchists' Guide to Real Life.)<<<<<

—Toro (10:41:11/5-18-56)

OWNERSHIP

The Big A is a private corporation, meaning its shares don't trade on any stock markets. (Shares of lots of its subsidiaries certainly do, however.) This private status gives the Pyramid some major advantages and a couple of disadvantages. First off, a private corp doesn't have to file quarterly reports with the various Securities and Exchange Commissions that watchdog the virtual exchanges. Privates also don't have to send out annual reports to shareholders, and prospectuses to would-be shareholders. They don't have to crack their books to show to the hoi polloi at annual general meetings. They can keep everything close to the chest. Also, by slapping sometimes draconian limits on private stock sales, privates can make sure that some corporate raider can't waltz in and snatch the corp out from underneath them. (Hey, it happens ...)

On the down side, it's potentially more difficult for a private outfit to generate investment in a hurry if it gets into deep economic drek. Public corps can issue another series of stock, millions of shares, on the open market whenever they need an infusion of capital. Privates usually can't. They can offer more stock for sale to their current shareholders, but what if those slags are already in for all they can float? Even in Aztlan, corps have to keep the total number of shareholders under a certain threshold to maintain private status.

So who owns Aztechnology? A consortium of shadowy figures, that's who. Now don't get torqued out yet, I'm not yapping about any kind of conspiracy theory here. When you get right down to it, in the Sixth World most private corporations are owned by a consortium of shadowy figures. That's another major advantage of being a private corp: no need to publicly announce the names of the major shareholders (and hence owners of the company). Private corps are the perfect choice for investors who want to keep a low profile for their own reasons (sometimes scurrilous, sometimes just because the poor slags want to live a normal life without attracting the attention of scam artists, extortionists, and kidnappers).

The problem is, there's almost *nothing* to be dug up on who really owns Aztechnology. We know who started ORO way back when, but after those chummers went to their great reward (or wherever), nobody said nothin' about who owned the show. Sure, there are rumors—plenty, in fact—but none I'd bet my lunch or anyone else's on. I've included most of the rumors on the key shareholders and directors later in this file. If you can dig up other names, you're a better man than I am, Gunga Dinh.

>>>>>(So what about all the rumors about the dragon in the pyramid? Huh?)<<<<<

—Jake (15:24:11/5-5-56)

>>>>>(<sigh> Okay, yeah, I've heard those rumors too. "Up on the senior exec floors of the Aztechnology pyramid in Tenochtitlán, there's a dragon, a feathered serpent. Maybe even a Great feathered serpent." Are those the rumors you're bagging on about?

Chummers, I confirm that there is a rumor that a Great feathered serpent is involved in the running/ownership of Aztechnology. There are also a couple of feathered serpents further down the

hierarchy, junior vice president level and below, but none that would have access to the penthouse "executive country." Okay?

Let's take a poll. Has anyone out there scanning this actually seen this mysterious dragon? Seen it personally, not "heard from a friend of a second cousin" or some drek. Well?)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (10:04:15/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Thought not.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (09:56:21/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Hey, slub—that just means nobody who's actually seen it lived to talk about it. Neh?)<<<<<

—Dakka (03:45:01/5-11-56)

>>>>>(You could make the same argument about the tooth fairy, neh? Anyway, bear with me. I'll have more to say on the dragon drek later.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (08:31:42/5-11-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] The dragon theory has been around for some time, hasn't it? It's never been proven, correct?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Correct.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] And yet it persists.

:::::[HECATE] I would have thought you of all beings would know whether or not a Great was in charge there.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Even we do not know who of us survived your down-cycle "hunting," my dear.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Well, I—

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] And if we knew for certain who was responsible, we might not be having so pleasant a conversation.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Of course, some of us have Greats as sworn enemies.

:::::[UMSONDO] The Rain Queen is not all of her kind.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Well, I can speak with a clear conscience, and I can also say that I have seen no direct evidence of dragon magic. None. I've seen and felt a great many "odd" magics, but nothing dragon.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I take it then that you could not recognize the style or form?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] No, I could not.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Aztechnology has a pretty standard management structure. Like many megacorps, it's a tad top-heavy—almost as many chiefs as injuns, to use an old and politically incorrect phrase—but it's not as bad as some entrenched bureaucracies (like Ares Macrotech). Each of the six major divisions is run by a senior vice president, regional subdivisions by a junior vice president (or managing director in the case of Europe, where some of the regional subdivisions are teeny because the continent's Balkanized).

Because this post is going up on the Seattle node first before it gets distributed throughout the rest of Shadowland, here's some Puget-centric data. The Aztechnology complex in Seattle is the HQ of Az-NA Northwest. It's in charge of all Azzie operations in Seattle, Salish-Shidhe, Tsimshian, and Tir Tairngire (yeah, right). The junior veep in charge of the northwest subdivision is still Salvador Ramirez. He took over the job in 2040, and he's still in the corner office. (His immediate subordinates haven't fared quite so well. The Seattle office has suffered a pretty harsh degree of turnover, particularly in the last couple of years. Don't ask me why.) And yes, it's the same "Fiera" Ramirez: the one who used to be the Azzie "expediter" in Panama and Honduras.

>>>>>("*Fiera*" means "wild beast." He didn't get that name for his temper—he's gotten real good at controlling that. The "executive escorts" who "service" Aztechnology's senior suits in Seattle started calling him that, and the name just kinda spread.)<<<<<

—Spook (05.25:02/5-8-56)

Below the junior-veep/managing-director level, the reporting structure gets variable to the point of apparently being completely arbitrary. Junior veeps/MDs can order their own houses pretty much how they like, as long as their end produces the way the senior management expects. The manager is personally responsible for the way the performance of *everyone and everything* under his control affects profits and losses. If the next level up the pecking order feels like it, a manager-type can be held personally responsible for each and every frag-up that happens in his or her little "empire," right the way down to the most junior grunt or data pusher. This kind of enforcement looks pretty arbitrary to an outsider. Look at "Fiera" Ramirez; he's been turning in only an average annual growth of 9 percent from his division, but he's still got his job (and his head). Nonetheless, it probably makes some kind of sense to the expert systems at head office.

Senior Management Team

The Big A's senior management cadre numbers eight heavy suits. Here's the play list and everything I could scrounge up on the key names. Feel free to annotate (as if I have to suggest that ;...).

President/CEO: Juan Atzcapotzalco, no prizes for guessing that one. The Big Juan has held the position for nigh on twelve years now. Over the last eight of those years, he's cut back on his public appearances to the point of near invisibility—he hasn't appeared even on internal corp trid for almost two years. Despite the vanishing act, drek keeps pouring out of his office with his electronic signature attached. Make of that what you will.

>>>>>(Like I said before, Atzcapotzalco cacked off fragging near nine years ago now. The real powers at Aztechnology puppeted him around as a figurehead for awhile, but now they've stopped making even that token effort. (Probably because the Big Juan is getting a touch ripe after nine years ...))<<<<<
—Rat Dancer (23:01:41/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Yes, well ... Next topic.)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (09:18:08/5-14-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] How odd. Why would they do that when it would be so simple just to create a simulacrum or surrogate of some kind?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Personal experience again?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Atzcapotzalco has always been something of an enigma, even when he was still a public figure. We've received clear reports that he is magically capable and quite proficient; yet when I was in Aztlan on business ten years ago (in my "guise") I actually managed to get close to him for a short time. I felt a palpable sense of power about him, and yet no effluence of an easily discernable aura. I thought perhaps it was a double, but all other evidence indicated otherwise.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I've met him as well, a little less than eight years ago (after Mr. "Rat Dancer" says he "cacked off"). We ... had words about certain Aztechnology practices and efforts with regard to the Tir. He was not amused. I was not amused. He is a man of great power, mystic power. I would have taken him for one of us, but to all cursory examinations he appears simply human. Inexplicable.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Never dealt with the man, or whatever.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Could he have some artifact or object?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Possible, especially considering the area. Cat, you said that Amazonia has a Locus. Could Aztechnology have one as well?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Then why the blood rites?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] True.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Theirs could be corrupt.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] A curse on that thought!

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] YOU HAVE GONE OFF THE TRACK HERE. We shall return to this.

COO: Chief Operating Officer is Diego Chavez. This bigtime hard-hoop worked his way up the "extended assets" side of the corp (and yes, that means just what you think it means). He's 67, but his personal staff of gerontologists keep him looking like he's 45. Even though he doesn't get his hands wet any more, he definitely learned his problem-solving approach during his tenure as an expediter/assassin.

>>>>>(Chavez was personal bodyguard to Juan Ortega, Jefe of the Medellín cartel back in 2007.)<<<<<
—Flashburn (18:14:56/5-8-56)

>>>>>(That's interesting. Then Chavez probably knows who owns what at Aztechnology.)<<<<<
—Sabre (21:02:18/5-10-56)

>>>>>(You gonna ask him?)<<<<<
—Don John (18:28:18/5-11-56)

CFO: Chief Financial Officer and head bean counter is Carmencita Rico. She's got even better gerontologists than Chavez, because she looks like she's in her 30s when her actual age is 60-something. (Ain't technology wonderful?)

>>>>>(Rico's treatments are more than cosmetic. She's 70 years old, but she's still got a rep for exhausting an entire squad of "executive escorts" from the comfort detachment on a good night.)<<<<<
—Spook (13:56:29/5-14-56)

Nobody seems to know where Carmencita came from. Ten years ago she wasn't even a blip on the scope. Four years ago she slid into the CFO spot.

CIO: The youngest of the big managers, Tsurunaga Shinoyama won the Chief Information Officer chair on his fiftieth birthday, almost exactly a year ago. He manages, maintains, and enhances Aztechnology's Management Information System—and, while he's at it, the corp's entire computer supersystem. Unlike most of the other bigwigs, Shinoyama isn't a lifer with Aztechnology. Making an exception to its own preferred operating procedure, the Big A poached him away from Fuchi Asia four years ago and quickly groomed him for bigger things. Predictably, Shikei Nakatomi (who runs Fuchi Asia) hasn't forgiven the Big A for "extracting" one of his rising stars.

>>>>>(Three weeks after the extraction, Nakatomi sent a shadow team on a grease job to "expend" Shinoyama. Didn't work, of course, but it sure stirred up the hostility between Aztechnology and Fuchi Asia. (Unsubstantiated rumors buzz that it was Richard Villiers, honcho of Fuchi Americas and rival of Nakatomi who "blew" the op and let Aztechnology bag the designated hitters.))<<<<<
—Hangfire (21:18:58/5-9-56)

Senior Executive Vice Presidents: Four of them—three men, one woman, average age 57, average length of service with Aztechnology 30 years. (Hard-core veterans, in other words.) Here are the names, for what they're worth: José Escobedo, Juan LaTorre, Peter Morales, and Carmelita Rocha. Couldn't find much to differentiate any of them from each other; any of you readers is welcome to try. I do know Rocha slid into Rivera's spot after his chopper augered in. Could mean she was behind the hit, or maybe her patron called the shots.

>>>>>(Query: patron?)<<<<<
—HP (11:40:57/5-15-56)

>>>>>(Scan on.)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (09:11:41/5-16-56)

Corp Politics

All members of the senior management team are appointed by the board of directors. That's right, chummer; Atzcapotzalco has no hire/fire authority over *any* of these slots, even though they all nominally report to him according to the orgchart. I don't know this for sure, and I can only guess how it actually works, but I keep picking up buzz that several of the senior managers are little more than pawns in a weird game of political chess played by members of the board of directors. The way I scan it, individual senior managers have "patrons" among the directors. These patrons tell the managerial types how to vote, how to discharge their duties, how to tie their fragging shoes. To describe the senior managers as puppets only begins to cover the true scope of the board members' control.

>>>>>(That's buildrek. Any corporation that wants to stay afloat can't let it work that way.)<<<<<
—DNF (10:07:11/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Hey, Watcher. Any metatypes in the exec suites? You didn't specify.)<<<<<
—Loree (13:04:28/5-9-56)

>>>>>(That's a big negatory, Loree. They're humans in the higher ranks, probably because the Big A is pretty old-school when it comes to corporate climbing. You've got to pay your dues—decades of them—before you're eligible for a top spot, and elves/dwarfs just ain't been around long enough. (Check the ages and you'll see what I mean. Nobody in the senior management team is younger than 50.) As for orks and trolls, short life spans and—um—what most people assume are neurophysical challenges mark up two big strikes against them.)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (08:56:56/5-11-56)

Board of Directors

Apologies in advance, chummers: I couldn't dig up anywhere near as much dirt as I wanted on the directors. Frag it, I couldn't even find out for sure how many directors the Big A keeps around at any one time. Best guess, about a dozen of them. I've only managed to scoop up unsubstantiated drek on three.

>>>>>(Even for a private company, the law requires the directors to be listed. That's UCAS *and* Aztlan law.)<<<<<
—Legal Beagle (02:45:15/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Too true, Beagle. Shame that Aztlan waived that legal requirement in the case of Aztechnology, huh?)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (15:23:52/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Hey, Loree, thought you might like to know there are metatypes among the directors (in addition to the feathered serpent, of course). Age and long service don't count as much when it comes to directors. Number of shares owned is all that really matters.)<<<<<
— Pyramid Watcher (08:59:00/5-11-56)

The Dragon: Persistent rumors push this one to the top of the heap. The dragon's allegedly a Great feathered serpent, and by some accounts female, but little else is known. A few people have reported occasional sightings of larger-than-standard feathered serpents arriving at or departing from the main Aztechnology Pyramid, but nothing verifiable.

>>>>>(Come on! There's got to be some kind of leak! No company is that tight.)<<<<<
—Dingbat (12:47:05/5-08-56)

>>>>>(The upper ranks of Aztechnology are. We assume that the senior managers know who's who on the board of directors, but are we safe in making that assumption? They might be in the dark as much as we are.)<<<<<
— Pyramid Watcher (09:02:38/5-11-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I'm really surprised that none of us can confirm or disprove this dragon rumor.

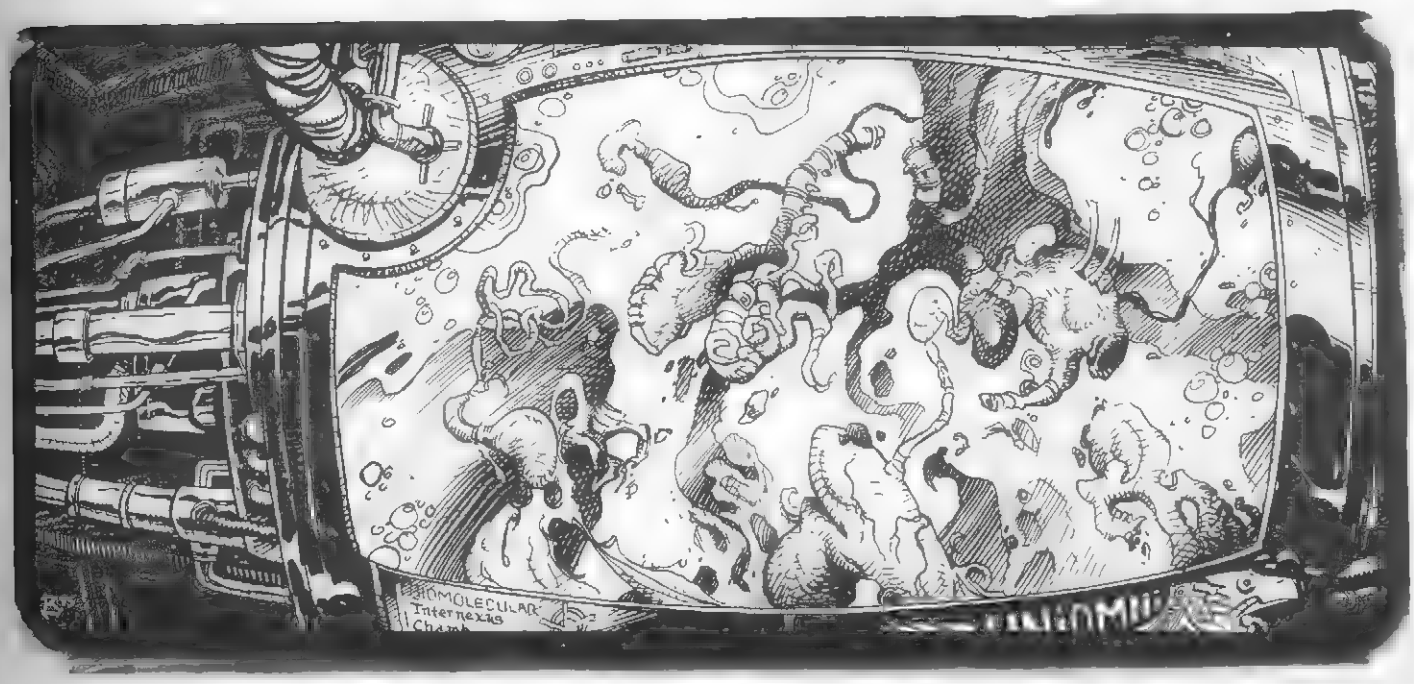
:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] That would involve facts, my Lady. We are, if nothing else, simply a bunch of rumormongers.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I for one am beginning to believe, Lady, that your statement may not be entirely true.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] What, that I am surprised? I resent the—

:::::[WORDSMYTH] No, that no one here knows the truth.

Thomas Roxborough: Old Roxy's an interesting case study. Roxy was a drek-hot corporate raider—an "acquisition specialist," the kind of slag who makes his cred by staging hostile takeovers of vulnerable companies, then splitting them up and selling their assets off to other outfits. Richer than all snot, was Roxy-boy, seemingly living a charmed life.



In 2049, he found out he was dying. He had some really unpleasant autoimmune disease that caused his body to attack, kill, and ultimately metabolize its own tissue (pretty fragging gross, if you ask me). His doctors gave him nine months. So he got a new bunch of doctors ... and they gave him six months. Roxy wasn't the kind of chummer to take that lying down, so he bopped on over from his home in the UK to Houston, where a gengineering outfit called Universal Omnitech had just taken over the M.D. Anderson hospital at the Houston Medical Center. UniOmni—in case you haven't heard of them—has been out on the bleeding edge of gengineering and genetech for six or seven years, and they told Roxy they had some new experimental germline therapy that should be able to save him.

It was experimental treatment, of course, with all the risk that implied. But Roxy figured that even if he was tossing dice that were loaded against him, it beat waiting around while his lymphocytes ate his brain. So into the vat he jumps, and the UniOmni docs start working their black juju.

Roxy's still alive six years after D-Day ("Dead Day"). He's still playing the market, though no longer in person—more on that anon—and he's apparently enjoying being in the catbird seat when it comes to the Big A. He can't attend board meetings in-the-meat, but that's okay; a holotrid projector can put a perfectly rendered, 3D simulacrum in a seat at the boardroom table (the eyes even track properly; way frosty).

So why can't Roxy come out to play on the corporate raider circuit any more? Why can't he show up in-the-meat to Azzie board meetings? Well, it's rather embarrassing ...

See, he's still in the tank at the Universal Omnitech Anderson Hospital and Research facility—the same one he jumped into six years ago. And that's where he'll remain until he dies of old age, maybe a couple of centuries down the pike. (Unless somebody accidentally pulls the plug on him before that.) The germline therapy did what the UniOmni docs promised—it counteracted the nasty effects of Roxy's autoimmune disease. It also had some unexpected side effects. The way I hear it, old Tommy Roxborough isn't really *human* any more. His mind's still intact—or so everybody claims—but his body ... well, best not to dwell too long on that. Let's just say that a bunch of the cells in his body redifferentiated themselves under the effects of the genetech. Cells that had been happy being part of his liver suddenly decided they'd rather be muscle. And vice versa. And so on. Unpleasant.

And that, boys and girls, is why you'll encounter Mr. Thomas Roxborough, Esq., only in the Matrix.

>>>>>(How the frag can anyone claim his mind's untouched? What's to stop his brain cells from redifferentiating as well?)<<<<<

—Timothee (17:31:13/5-7-56)

>>>>>(True, Roxy's decisions have been growing a little ... surprising ... of late. But he's a major shareholder, and that's all she wrote.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (10:06:44/5-8-56)

>>>>>(I'm surprised not to see the other rumor about Thomas Roxborough here—namely, that his "tank" isn't at UniOmni anymore. Any guesses as to where he might be?)<<<<<

—Trinidad (03:28:15/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Some unnamed Central American clinic, perhaps?)<<<<<

—Hangfire (13:21:25/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Give the man the big stuffed bear! And even more interesting, I hear through my financial contacts that Roxy has been telling friends he'll be able to "meet them in the flesh again" very soon now.)

—Trinidad (23.28:17/5-12-56)

>>>>>(What? All the information I have says his condition is incurable—that he's deteriorated too far. What you're hearing can't be true.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (20:17:27/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Your information, PW, matches mine. I'm just repeating what he's been telling people.)<<<<<

—Trinidad (14:08:50/5-14-56)

Domingo Ramos: Yep, boys and girls, the name should look familiar. Domingo ("Ding" to his friends) is the son of Julio Ramos, the Panamanian drug lord and the "R" in "ORO." Spirits alone know how much Ding Ramos inherited from daddy, but I'd figure close to 5 percent of Aztechnology's issued shares.

Ding's a quiet chap, with simple tastes; he just wants the absolute best of everything, and as much of it as he can lay fists on. He's a walking example of family values; just ask his four ex-wives, seven mistresses and twenty-odd illegitimate brats. He comes to Tenochtitlán frequently but spends most of his time near his birthplace—specifically, in a high-security enclave complete with a zoo-full of endangered animals, just outside Concepción in Panama State.

Oh and, by the way—Ding's an elf.

:::::[HECATE] An elf? Is he Gifted?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I don't believe the right evaluations have ever been carried out.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] His behavior says he ought to be. Another Watcher?

:::::[UMSONDO] No.

:::::[HECATE] Laughing Man insults us!

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Must I always keep order among my children? Let us proceed ...

Other Directors

That's all I could get my mitts on. My guess is that these top three, whoever the number one slot might really be, own between them about 25 percent of outstanding Aztechnology stock. I figure another nine or so people I haven't been able to tag own the other 75 percent. Just for the sake of completeness, I'll toss out the major rumors I've heard about these other figures. Oh, and Captain Chaos has asked me to say, "Please limit your comments to those that can claim at least partial support, okay?" Otherwise he'll have to cut you off and purge the log. Again.

Common rumor number 1: *Atzcapotzalco is a minority shareholder, owning about 2 percent of the outstanding stock.* I keep hearing this one, but I don't know. Maybe he owns stock, but I'm pretty fragging sure somebody else votes it. Make of that what you will.

Common rumor number 2: *One of the major shareholders is a free spirit—a "player," to use the common argot.* I don't know about this one either, but I have less difficulty believing this rumor than the one about Atzcapotzalco.

>>>>>(It's true, chummers. Trust me, I know. Only the spirit isn't a player, it's a fragging shadow. That's the clean scan. It's one of those blood spirit things. And it prefers to receive its dividend payments in sacrifices, not cred.)<<<<<

—Stonecoat (03:16:15/5-21-56)

>>>>>(I'm not going to dignify that with a fragging answer.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (10:22:04/5-21-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Cat? Would that explain the strange magics?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] No. There are plenty of spirits in Amazonia. I recognize their taste, as it were.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Yes, I'm sure "as it were." Indeed. <chuckle>

:::::[UMSONDO] With all due respect, Hecate has perhaps not observed for a sufficient length of time to draw the correct conclusions.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] What? We are all wrong and you are right?

:::::[UMSONDO] I merely caution against conclusions based on too few observations. I say no more of the matter.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] That was sufficient. We will do well to think more on this. Perhaps, after all, this meeting has some reward to add to its irritations.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] At last, I receive some thanks. I accept them in the spirit of generosity in which they were offered.

:::::>THE LAUGHING MAN CHUCKLES

>>>>>(As we're talking about this issue again, here's something else I heard about blood spirits. (Could blood spirits be the source for the myths about those tzitzimine demons that some Aztlaners rattle on about? Just a thought.)

Chummer of mine said he was in astral communication with a blood spirit that told him it used to be a mortal—specifically,

an Aztec priest who cacked off before Columbus was even an itch in his father's pants. He and some of his fellow priests have been floating around the astral ever since way-back-then, disembodied spirits forgotten by their gods—or so they thought. They couldn't do squat about it. For more than a thousand years, nobody in the meatworld could see them or communicate with them. (And that, chummigos, is about the worst kind of hard time I can think of.)

So then along came the upswing in magic, and people started to become aware of the spirits again. First thing most of those people tried to do? Bind them and control them—demand services of them or turn them into fragging ally spirits.

On the other hand, the dead priests can communicate the other way. They can get living slubs to conduct blood sacrifices for them, to the gods who apparently forgot them. Sacrifices to convince the gods that enough's enough, and it's time to be reincarnated.

That's what the spirit told my friend, at least.)<<<<<

—NiteSpawn (19:18:55/5-24-56)

>>>>>(Bulldrek.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (17:10:21/5-25-56)

>>>>>(Actually, I have no problem believing that the spirit told NiteSpawn's chummer all that stuff. I just don't believe the spirit's story is true. Spirits lie just as often as mortals. By the way, there's some interesting stuff on the tzitzimine in the **Religion and Magic** file later on in this post.)<<<<<

—Doc (21:57:24/5-25-56)

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Possible?

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] No.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Hardly.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Perhaps, depending ...

:::::[HECATE] Depending on where and how the sacrifice took place. If the ritual were conducted in a area that maintained its potency, then yes, I believe it is possible. Likely? No.

Common rumor number 3: *Damien Knight is a major shareholder of Aztechnology.* My scan on this one? Bulldrek in the first degree.

Common rumor number 4: *One of the major shareholders of Aztechnology is an AI—an artificial intelligence, "living" in the main datacores of the Aztechnology HQ in Tenochtitlán.* Unlike some of the other wild-hooped rumors, this one's tougher to blow off immediately.

>>>>>(How the frag can an AI be said to own something? It's just computer code, for frag's sake.)<<<<<

—Sidewinder (00:21:16/5-6-56)

>>>>>(No problem. "Entities" that are a lot more abstract than an AI—assuming AIs exist—can legally own things. Corporations, for example—they're legal fictions, but they most certainly own things. Neh?)<<<<<

—Legal Beagle (11:24:21/5-6-56)

:::::[HECATE] A computer?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Technically possible, but not likely under current conditions. There are rumors, of course. Renraku, Fuchi, and Saeder-Krupp are all supposed to have one or more AIs in development.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] The Denver Nexus is rumored to have or be one.

:::::[HECATE] I must admit technology is my weak spot. It is possible?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] As I said, not under current conditions. Possible, that one can make a machine "smart" and "fast" enough to convince a human that it is alive ...

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ah yes, the Turing Test.

:::::[HECATE] The what?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] A test by which one can supposedly determine if a machine is sentient. If in a blind test the tester cannot differentiate between the machine and another human being, the machine is sentient.

:::::[HECATE] Preposterous!

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Indeed. I would ask, who needs to be convinced? Anyone? The test depends on the use of a communication channel sufficiently degraded in content and context that the discrimination becomes impossible. The Turing Test is as much a mere sleight of hand as any trivial children's party trick. I possess an interesting paper debunking it by one Dr. Antonio Vieri of the University of Milano, though I think we might find that the good Doctor did not exist. As such.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Indeed. Why would Brightlight have chosen Milan?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Well, he'd done Florence and Venice, after all. <chuckle> He bores easily.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] The point is moot, as we can now use magic to test. And I do not believe we will see genuine artificial sentience until we have true techno-organic machines. An expert system smart enough to fool a human? Certainly, but it won't be alive.

I've heard from several people I trust that something whacked-out is happening in the Azzie datacores, and that something could well be an AI. (Yes, yes, I know. Any corp with an arcology or even a building remotely like a pyramid is reputed to have a tame AI. It's like the little boy who cried wolf, or whatever. But I know what I've heard.) I've also scanned a couple of theoretical studies here on Shadowland that imply there's a single "brain" or "intent" behind Aztechnology's actions. (I'm no statistical psych, so don't ask me for details.) Those two chunks of evidence—hearsay, granted—might imply there actually is an AI on the board of directors. Don't know, chummer. But could be.

>>>>>(If there's an AI in the Azzie datacores, I don't figure they put it there on purpose. The Big A's put one frag of a lot less effort into AI development programs than other megas. Since those other megas' massively funded programs haven't hit paydata, doesn't seem likely the Azzies' did.

But an AI might have arisen spontaneously as an emergent property of a complex computer system. (Frag, that idea's been around for a century, give or take.) If I had to bet on the one spot in the universe most likely to see an AI pop out spontaneously, it'd be the Azzie central system—the Heart of Darkness.)<<<<<

—Red Wraith (02:32:52/5-12-56)

>>>>>(What have you been slotting, Wraith? If anything like that's going to pop out, it'll happen in the Nexus—the Denver Data Haven. More computer horsepower there than anywhere else in the fragging world.)<<<<<

—Slicer (02:33:56/5-12-56)

>>>>>(There's more to it than horsepower.)<<<<<

—Red Wraith (02:35:04/5-12-56)

>>>>>(The Ghostly One is too cautious to say that Azzie computer research has gone in different directions from other corps. Instead of direct research into AIs, they've concentrated on biocomps: biological computers. I'm talking computers based on *brains*—real tissue brains, sliced and resectioned or floating in vats of electrolytes. Specifically, mammalian brains. And even more specifically, *(meta)human* brains (possibly still alive and aware ... <shudder>). Makes sense, doesn't it? Even a modern optical supercomputer can't match the density and complexity of a human brain. And no form of data storage/retrieval system can match the brain's data capacity.

So there could well be an AI in the Azzie datacores. The "hardware" that gives *us* self-awareness is definitely present. Why not self-awareness itself?)<<<<<

—Arclight (22:18:10/5-12-56)

:::::[HECATE] There is your "techno-organic" computer, word-player.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Possible, but I think the task is far beyond current expertise.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Some people say that there are "entities" in the Matrix.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ah, the techno-shamanic cults. Yes, they do say that. Should we believe them? No. They're among the loonier people I know.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] There is always Brightlight ...

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Would he associate with these fools?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Point taken.

:::::[HECATE] Agreement between you! The moon will rise and set a hundred thousand times before that happens again.

Common rumor number 5: *A single individual, (meta)human or otherwise, runs the whole Aztechnology organization.* According to most readings of this rumor, the entire board of directors and the management team are puppets (not just poor Atzcapotzalco).

Well, maybe. Like I said above, some tentative evidence implies that Aztechnology shows more unity of purpose and action than most other corps. So that you can understand what I'm yammering about, here's a little background.

There is a specific school of psychological analysis, "statistical psych" or something similar, that devotes its efforts to analyzing the decision-making process. According to this school of thought, if you analyze enough decisions coming from a particular source—even a "black box," like a military command or Aztechnology senior management—you can draw some important conclusions about the structure of the source. For example, you can tell if it's a single individual or a group calling the shots. If you know it's a group and you also know a little about the individuals in that group, you can estimate whose voice carries the most weight. And drek like that. (Okay, I admit it: it sounds like some kind of black art to me, too.)

>>>>>(It's real. Various military intelligence outfits have worked on this drek for years. It's a statistically valid way of picking out who the real decision makers are in an enemy force so you can target them for assassination.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (19:04:21/5-10-56)

Anyhow, some statistical psychs have run their mondo juju on decisions percolating down from Aztechnology's board of directors. If you buy in to their conclusions, none of the slags I've listed above—Atzcapotzalco, the dragon, Roxborough, Ramos or any of the others—has any statistically significant input into major decisions. The majority of those decisions are coming from one source, one individual whom I haven't been able to tag. (A couple of the stat-psych chrome-domes were making some pret-ty weird suppositions about that individual—too weird, if you ask me.)

That's all the light I can throw on this one. If you believe this stat-psych stuff, you've got your answers. If not, keep looking.

>>>>>(I buy it all the way to the ground. That one individual pulling all the strings is the fragging *dragon*, chummers. The one in the pyramid in Tenochtitlán.)<<<<<

—Jake (15:51:29/5-5-56)

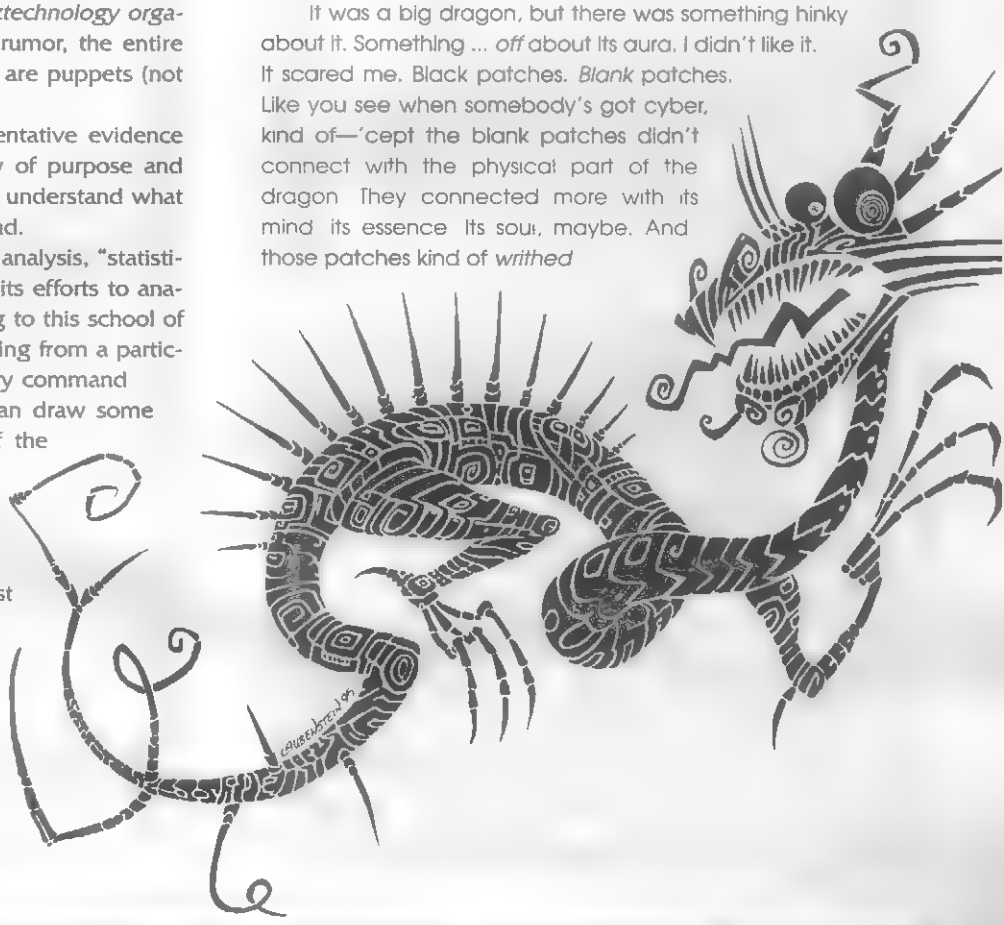
>>>>>(Will you stop ... ?)<<<<<

—Greer (19:14:02/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Hoi. Well. This dragon drek. Maybe I *did* see something. I didn't want to say anything at first 'cause I didn't want to get flamed. But hey, maybe it's important. I don't know.

I saw a dragon, an eastern dragon, landing on top of the Aztechnology pyramid in Tenochtitlán. Saw it from the astral. I was on a vision quest.

It was a big dragon, but there was something hinky about it. Something ... *off* about its aura. I didn't like it. It scared me. Black patches. *Blank* patches. Like you see when somebody's got cyber, kind of—'cept the blank patches didn't connect with the physical part of the dragon. They connected more with its mind, its essence. Its soul, maybe. And those patches kind of *writhed*



It landed on the pyramid. Then it went inside. Last I saw of it. But it was there. And it was big.)<<<<<

—Bobby Two Eagles (11:25:15/5-27-56)

>>>>>(Uh-huh. Bobby, old chummer, tell me the truth. You'd dropped something, hadn't you, huh? You'd dropped something before going for your astral jaunt. Hadn't you?)<<<<<

—Glynnis (13:20:11/5-27-56)

>>>>>(Just some peyote. Nothing much. Two buds. Maybe three. Vision quests are *hard*. Sometimes I need some help along the way. Maybe four buds. Why?)<<<<<

—Bobby Two Eagles (10:55:35/6-1-56)

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] He saw this on a vision quest?? That alarms me more than anything else.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] The source is questionable, Cat, despite what you might believe. But ... black and blank patches in his aura that writhed?? That sounds like something of which this person should have no knowledge ...

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Is it what I think it is?

:::::[HECATE] You are too young to have experienced it personally, my dear, but yes. It sounds like Corruption.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] You would know, my dear.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] QUIET! We are at the heart of the matter!

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I thought we might be, old wyrm. And I'll admit this requires further investigation—but additional supposition here is pointless. We're treading on deep dark secrets I suspect we'd rather not bring up in mixed company. The wounds, for some, are too fresh ... Oh, dear, now I'm sounding like the wordster.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Remarkably, again I must agree with my painted friend. This sounds potentially dangerous; the implications are frightening. But if we are only going to wander into territory that causes dissent, we should stop, acquire more information, and then speak again.

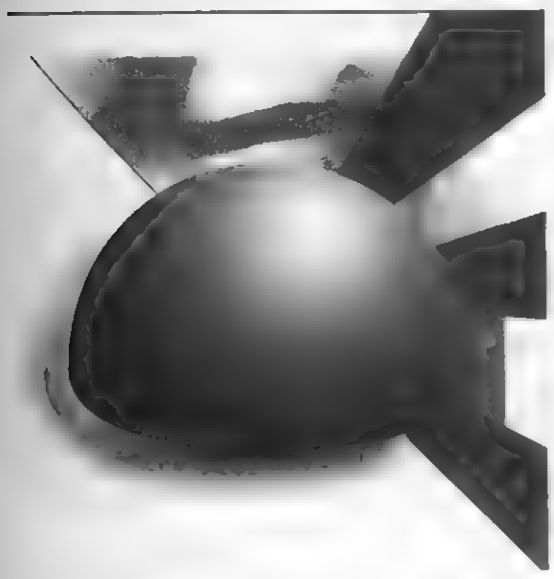
:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Words! Words! How much more time will slip past? The cycles repeat themselves truly, do they not? You would all stand idly by while this horror continues until you can "research" it more and "discuss" it further?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I for one will not be inactive, my friend. Fate has already dragged me into this. I will continue my fight.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Oh, please ...

EAST ASIA

BUSINESS PRACTICES



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Security: Members Only (Alpha-5 Green)
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Another in the series of introductory e-pubs provided by the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Marketing Association, this document introduces members to the standard business practices of Tenochtitlán-based Aztechnology Corporation. As with most other megacorporations, it is difficult—indeed, dangerous—to generalize about an organization as widespread and diverse as Aztechnology. SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for one division or subdivision may be absolutely unheard-of in another geographic locale or in a different industry segment. This document will concentrate on practices followed by the corporation's headquarters, on the assumption that these practices best reflect the central philosophy of the corporation.

>>>>>(In other words, just as corps are laws unto themselves, so are divisions within corps. Making decisions in an unfamiliar geographical or industrial area based on the way things get done back home is a great way of dumping yourself in deep drek. Word to the wise.)<<<<<

—Kevin Kelvin (15:10:38/5-11-56)

KEY INDUSTRY SEGMENTS

The industry segments in which Aztechnology shows dominance are chemicals, heavy industry, mystical goods/services, and military technology. Secondary segments include aerospace, biotechnology, consumer goods, cybernetics, and service.

>>>>>(Cybernetics is only a secondary segment? Thought somebody said the Azzies were going nova in biocomps. That qualifies as cybernetics, neh?)<<<<<

—Elder God (11:24:19/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Or biotech, depending on how you define it. Anyway, the "key segments" above sum up the activities Aztechnology's willing to admit to. Black projects like biocomps ain't going to be out there for public consumption. (Somehow, I can't imagine that the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere Marketing Association has a real hoop-kicker of an industrial espionage department.))<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (13:18:03/5-11-56)

Of these segments, the following are growing at more than 15 percent per annum (based on reported and estimated revenue): biotechnology, mystical goods/services, and military technology. The only major segment currently on the decline, at the marginal rate of 3 percent per annum based on reported/estimated revenue, is heavy industry.

>>>>>(Huh? I thought heavy industry was a money-spinner for the Azzies.)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (10:20:26/5-9-56)

>>>>>(It has been. But think it through. Where's most heavy industry located these days? Fourth-world nations, right? Places where they either don't realize how much the heavy industry is cacking up the environment or simply don't care. (It also helps that fourth-world wages are dirt compared to the rest of the planet.)

Now, where in the world are conditions generically risky to do biz? Those same fourth-world nations, *neh?* Always wracked by political upheavals, civil wars, ad fragging nauseam—tough to get things done under those conditions. And every time there's a political upheaval or civil war, what usually gets pasted? Fixed assets belonging to "oppressive" megacorporations, *neh?* In other words, factories.

So the Big A's seen the light and it's offloading a drekload of its heavy-industrial clout to second-tier corps—wannabes scrabbling for the main chance. Let other corps pay for the privilege of losing money when bomb-tossing loonies trash the factory *again*. The Big A's picking up the lost revenue in computer engineering, chummers. It's getting into process control and automation in a *big* way, selling high-powered expert-system software to the slubs who've just bought the big factories. That way the corp leverages itself by gaining when the manufacturers gain without any risk. (Part of the software deal is *always* a revenue-sharing license.) That's what I call clever.)<<<<<

—Pyramid Watcher (15.35:53/5-10-56)

EXPANSION/ACQUISITION AND COMPETITIVE PRACTICES

Aztechnology is among the most expansionist and acquisitive of the "triple-A" megacorporations. An entire department within the Tenochtitlán headquarters, reporting directly to the Chief Operating Officer (currently Diego Chavez), is responsible for identifying targets for hostile takeovers. This department has all the assets it needs to pick suitable subjects and evaluate the best way of breaking down the chosen target's defenses against takeovers. Under Chavez's leadership, the department seems to be growing ever more aggressive in this undertaking.

>>>>>(Knowing Chavez's background as an expediter and assassin, is it any wonder?)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (16:10:44/5-12-56)

Aztechnology routinely uses acquisition as a tactic when dealing with competition. The corporation has extended this practice to include minor subsidiaries of major corporations, a strategy that certainly has not endeared Aztechnology to its fellow megacorporations.

>>>>>(So? Big corps have always realized the wisdom of, "If you can't beat 'em, buy 'em." From Motorola, IBM, and Microsoft all the way up to Monobe, Renraku, and Aztechnology.)<<<<<

—Foster (15:47:57/5-11-56)

>>>>>(True enough. But Motorola, IBM, and Microsoft didn't blow up fabrication plants or geek executives to drive down the market price of the companies they wanted to absorb ...)<<<<<

—KHB (02:26.38/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Scan the "Competition" subfile of the **Corporate Shadowfiles** posting on this board. Go through and highlight every low-down dirty trick you can find in that text. Cut and paste the highlighted text into another file. You'll end up with a pretty good approximation of Aztechnology's procedural manual for handling competitors.)<<<<<

—Nagel (20:16:17/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Aztechnology tends not to hire many shadowrunners for this kind of drek, compared to some other megacorps I could name. The Big A has its own dirty-tricks squads on staff.)<<<<<

—Hangfire (23:59:25/5-13-56)

Aztechnology's approach to competitors' initiatives targeted against its own operations has been described as "scorched earth" and "total war." These descriptions are not far wrong, in a business sense. The megacorporation responds to what it considers an attack, even one as apparently benign as a direct challenge to market share in a particular segment, by going beyond reciprocity straight to massive escalation.

A convincing case study includes a challenge to Aztechnology's dominance of the chemical industry in Padua-Venice. Komatsu Corporation, a second-tier megacorporation, took over an obsolete petroleum-processing facility and turned it into a "cracking" plant for producing advanced chemical fertilizers, which had heretofore been Aztechnology's domain. Local Aztechnology management was slow in shifting from a monopolistic mindset to one that incorporated competition, and so during that time Komatsu undercut Aztechnology's prices and carved out a major market share.

Once Aztechnology saw the threat, the corporation's response was rapid and brutal. Throughout Europe, Aztechnology began "dumping" products into markets in which Komatsu held shares. Aztechnology undercut Komatsu's prices across Europe even when it meant losses, forcing the smaller corporation into a savage price war. Meanwhile, also at a loss, Aztechnology took over three minor corporations, namely, the only local companies that could supply Komatsu's Padua-Venice plant with raw materials. Having acquired them, Aztechnology immediately began to raise the prices of those raw materials.

Komatsu's management saw the writing on the wall and closed down the Padua-Venice plant. Aztechnology bought it at below-market value and added it to its own chemical empire. As soon as Komatsu conceded, Aztechnology stopped dumping its products and everything returned to business as usual. Various analysts estimate that this single response to competition cost Aztechnology almost 200 million nuyen.

>>>>>(But it worked, didn't it? Like a hot fragging damn it worked. Komatsu got bloodied and backed off. You can bet any other corp considering going toe-to-toe with the Big A takes a look at the Komatsu debacle, thinks twice, and backs off too. So sure, Aztechnology lost money kicking Komatsu in the pills. But how much did the corp save by not having to scrap it out with other corps that learned from Komatsu's pain?)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (16:13:11/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Aztechnology doesn't always keep the "total war" drek on a business footing. Sometimes the Azzies respond to a challenge a little more ... directly. I'm actually a bit surprised that Aztechnology didn't respond by sanctioning a couple of Komatsu's execs. Bullets and explosives cost a lot less than 200 mil.)<<<<<

—Hangfire (09:16:37/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Echo that, Hangfire. Also, the Azzies don't limit this "massive retaliation" drek to little fish in the corporate pond. On at least three occasions Aztechnology got into pissing contests with other AAA megas, and it was only sheer fragging luck that it didn't escalate into full-on corp war.)<<<<<

—Link (23:17:02/5-14-56)

INTERCORPORATE RELATIONSHIPS

Given Aztechnology's business practices, relations between it and other major megacorporations tend to be strained.

>>>>>(Understatement mode: enable.)<<<<<

—Bung (16:48:07/5-10-56)

Of all the triple-A megacorporations, only Mitsuhama seems to be on reasonable terms with Aztechnology at the time of this writing. The two corporations have been at loggerheads in the past, but these conflicts seem to have engendered a mutual respect that limits ongoing conflict.

>>>>>(Don't bet on that lasting. Personally, I wouldn't class either MCT or Big A as rational enough to keep the peace for much longer.)<<<<<

—Hangfire (09:17:58/5-13-56)

At the time of this report's compilation, relations between Aztechnology and Saeder-Krupp have been even more tense than usual. Though no direct conflicts have yet arisen between the two corporations' central holdings, the friction between "peripheral" subsidiaries is high, and continues to rise.

>>>>>(No drek. I keep getting rumbles that for some reason, Lofwyr's suddenly decided he loathes Atzcapotzalco (or whoever's pulling the Big Juan's strings), and by frag he's going to do something about it.)<<<<<

—Silver Dowager (19:04:59/5-16-56)

>>>>>(While we're on the topic of who hates who, I hear Telestrian Industries Corporation and Aztechnology are getting into a major pissing war.)<<<<<

—Markops (02:15:52/5-17-56)

>>>>>(So everybody's down on the Big A because they're just so darn evil wicked mean and nasty? <sneer>)<<<<<

—Samwise (23:57:04/5-19-56)

>>>>>(Hmm. It's been sounding that way, hasn't it? That's the problem with these single-topic SIGs: everybody trots out their "I hate Aztechnology" stories.

Chummers, in my books Aztechnology isn't significantly better or worse than any other megacorp. Okay, it's a tad quick to go for the knife when somebody steps on the old corporate toes. But dirty-tricks wise, it's no worse than Renraku or MCT or Ares. The consumer products it turns out are no drekkier, no more overpriced, and no more health-damaging than the drek tossed up on the market by everybody else. It keeps a whole fragging lot of credit circulating through the global economy, which helps everyone. And judging by what I've heard, employee satisfaction and loyalty are both high.

It's tempting to tar Aztechnology as the villain—so much simpler to scapegoat someone than look at the truth. Much simpler to blame and hate than to think.)<<<<<

—The Chromed Accountant (01:31:29/5-20-56)

>>>>>(Apologist. Fragging corp-loving pudlicking apologist. You miserable **(1.3 Mp deleted by SysOp)**)<<<<<

—Panther (17:08:39/5-21-56)

RECRUITING

Aztechnology has implemented a recruiting procedure more intense than that of any other megacorporation. Even Ares's vaunted "personnel sieve" is not as stringent as Aztechnology's selection system.

Candidates for all positions, even the most menial, must undergo a battery of aptitude and personality tests that takes up the better part of an entire day. For particularly sensitive positions, the test period is extended. "Outside hires" for senior positions typically undergo three days' worth of computer-administered aptitude tests, backed up by at least one personal interview—five or even more in the case of senior positions. Candidates for key positions are also requested to submit to a "paranatural screening process." The candidate has a right to refuse this request, but there are no cases on record where a candidate who refused was subsequently hired.

>>>>>("Paranatural screening process"—that's a magical mind-scan, boys and girls. An Azzie shaman or hermetic prancing through your mind, looking for christ knows what. (And leaving christ knows what in the way of post-hypnotic suggestions behind him ...) Can you say *scary?*)<<<<<

—Constanzia (13:32:11/5-11-56)

>>>>>(More to the point, chummers, this mind-scan is actually a bug hunt. Remember, the Big A knew about the fragging bug spirits long before anyone else did. The Azzies have gone to great lengths to keep those perverted chitinous bastards out of their precious corporation.)<<<<<

—Mugshot (21:45:30/5-11-56)

>>>>>(How the frag do you reach the conclusion that Aztechnology knew about the bugs before the rest of the megacorporate world?)<<<<<

—La Sombre (09:28:56/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Remember that datafile about the Universal Brotherhood that was up on the Net for a few minutes before the Shadowland server got toasted? (Four–five years ago, now, I guess.) That makes it pretty obvious, doesn't it?)<<<<<

—Mugshot (12:23:05/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Hmm. Okay, Aztechnology knew there was something hinky about the Universal Brotherhood. I'll give you that. But did the corp know what was hinky? Maybe management just didn't like sweetness-and-light brainwashers diddling their loyal employees. Would the Big A have reacted any differently if it had been another cult—say, the New Solar Temple or the Moonies or the Church of Christ (Geneticist), or whatever?)<<<<<

—Doc (13:40:52/5-13-56)

As part of the application package, all candidates must provide detailed personal and professional references. Aztechnology recruiters contact all of these references to confirm the pertinent facts about the applicant.

For senior positions, Aztechnology prefers to promote from within rather than hire from without. Though no megacorporation today can maintain the old *zaibatsu* ideal of guaranteed lifetime employment, Aztechnology comes the closest. This practice inspires a high degree of employee loyalty to the organization.

Aztechnology has shown less interest than other megacorporations in forcefully "extracting" personnel from competing organizations. Conversely, Aztechnology responds particularly strongly to extraction attempts targeted against its own personnel.

>>>>>(Yeah, no drek there. One of the nastiest runs I ever took was an extraction against Aztechnology—Ares had tried to poach a particular researcher, but said researcher told Ares where to stick its offer. Enter me and my team to put the researcher in a bag and drag her away.

No fun. The run got blown and we had to fight our way out, dragging the researcher along with us. Just as we're about to make it out, some of those fragging Leopard Guards burst out of nowhere and messily cack the researcher (along with three of my buds).

That's Azzie SOP response to extraction attempts: take down the asset being extracted. Kind of an "If we can't have her, nobody can" attitude.)<<<<<

—Blunt Object (21:14:52/5-13-56)

>>>>>(That's standard Azzie moves, all right. And on the topic of the Big A running extractions, it generally doesn't pursue "unilateral" (unwilling) extractions. If an asset wants to jump corporate ship, though, Aztechnology's Johnny-on-the-spot to help make it happen.)<<<<<

—Argent (00:31:18/5-14-56)

KES FileSpec:
KES1000/companal.az.acs/compet.intro/1002
******KES Proprietary******
Security Profile: BlackKnight-008

>>>>>(You will notice that Espectro, who sent us this file, and Knight Errant, who compiled this file, apparently play the mental games that allow them to buy into the story that Aztechnology and Aztlan possess significantly distinct "security" forces. Knight Errant gives us the lowdown on the Aztechnology sec forces, then our old friend Arctic White does a little compare-and-contrast with the Aztlan military so that you can scan the whole picture. The main point? The two are so intricately integrated that one cannot function effectively without the other. Their coordinated efforts are what make both forces so efficient. Read on and weep.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:50:14/5-1-56)

Internal and external site security for Aztechnology Corporation is provided by Aztechnology Corporate Security (ACS), a subdivision of the corporate structure. Individual ACS units are under the authority of local corporate management. (The ACS forces tasked to protect the Aztechnology pyramid in Seattle, for example, are under the authority of the senior manager for that facility.) ACS personnel are "seconded" to sites and facilities and instructed to follow the orders of senior local management, but this instruction can be countermanded by senior ACS officers if and when necessary.

In effect, ACS is a distinct organization under the overall "umbrella" of Aztechnology. ACS has its own reporting structure, chain of command, and promotion path. The overall commander of ACS is classed as managing director, though the position is more akin in many ways to a military officer and reports directly to the Chief Operating Officer.

>>>>>(The slitch in charge of the ACS these days is Carmel Vega: Desert Wars veteran and a "second-generation" Azzie employee. (Her dad was an expediter with ORO when she was born.))<<<<<

—Thibault (21:15:43/5-7-56)

The ACS forces within Aztlan seem larger than would appear necessary to offer security for Aztechnology's assets there, mainly because the ACS also serves as Aztlan's primary civilian law enforcement agency.

>>>>>(I know it's been said before, but it pays to echo it. Chummers, if you break the law anywhere in Aztlan, the odds are fragging good that ACS personnel will come after you.)<<<<<

—Viviane (15:00:25/5-8-56)

This introductory competitive analysis uses the standard "operational profile" to rate various aspects of the ACS's activities. This profile is a zero-to-ten scale. (For comparison, the operational profile of Ares Macrotechnology is as follows:

Overall Security:	7
Magic:	7
Matrix:	7
Physical:	9

On this scale, Aztechnology's Overall Security Rating is 8.)

>>>>>(If you think you recognize this drek, chummers, it's because the info in the Corporate Shadowfiles post showed up in the same format.)<<<<<

—Dobu (00:42:15/5-11-56)

MAGICAL SECURITY

Rating: 9

Aztechnology is rightly famous for its magical security provisions. The corporation has a higher-than-average number of magically active individuals among its security personnel. ACS also carefully considers the role of magic in almost all of its security procedures, both in terms of tactics and stratagems the opposition may use and specific counters to those tactics. (Even corporations with otherwise competent security personnel, such as Yamatetsu and Shiawase, are often surprisingly careless about magical threats and responses.)

Aztechnology favors integrating its magical assets with nonmagically active forces. Aztechnology shamans and mages usually serve alongside mundane forces at the platoon level, rather than remaining sequestered in separate magically active units.

ACS uses watcher spirits extensively as sentries, a sort of magical "tripwire." Watchers are instructed to sound an alert and summon help if any type of magical intrusion occurs. Such watchers usually work in teams of two; one of them bird-dogs the intruder while the other hurries to summon support from a spellcaster or (more frequently) a powerful spirit or elemental.

>>>>>(And chummers, the system works like a hot fragging damn, let me tell you that. I was doing the old ghost-walk through what I thought was a disused Azzie facility. Wrongo. The lights might have been out, but someone or something was

home. Before I know it, there's this little twink of a watcher spirit shrieking and gibbering at me while its identical twin burns off for parts unknown howling at the top of its psychic voice. If I'd been quicker on the draw, I might have cut 'em both down before they hollered for help, but I was a beat too slow.

So I splattered the little thing gibbering in my ear—the noise made it hard to concentrate. Just then the other watcher came back, leading the biggest fire elemental I've ever had the displeasure to meet. And boy was it pissed ...

Come to think of it, I guess I was lucky it wasn't one of those blood spirit things. <shudder>)<<<<<

—NiteSpawn (15:21:19/5-16-56)

Highly sensitive areas are often patrolled by paranaturals of various kinds. The corporation seems to favor hellhounds and piasmae, though it also uses nagas, cockatrices and basilisks. Unsubstantiated but interesting reports hint that feathered serpents possess great expertise at training nagas. In certain sensitive locales, Aztechnology uses an apparently unknown technique to generate a powerful "mana field." The intensity of this field distorts the vision of astral observers, making it a useful addition to astral security.

>>>>>(Huh? Oh, I get it. This "mana field" is the background count that magical types are always rattling about, neh? I read ahead, and in another section peeps are saying the Azzie background count makes some teocalli glow like the fragging sun. Hey, could the Az-boys be doing that on purpose, just to scare us off?)<<<<<

—Essian (22:37:34/5-19-56)

>>>>>(One thing to stress. Mages and shamans are rare, chummers, don't forget that. I read somewhere that maybe 1 percent of the population has any magical "talent" at all. Because Aztechnology goes to such great lengths to hire magically adept security personnel, the incidence of magic use in the ACS is closer to 2 percent. (This figure is somewhere between a conservative estimate and a wild-hooped guess.) So for each 100 Azzie sec-guards you exchange pleasantries and small-arms fire with, maybe two of them'll be spellslingers.

But chummers, that doesn't mean the other 98 percent are pure whitebread vanilla mundane without a touch of magic, okay? One of an Azzie security mage's major duties is whipping up magical gewgaws for his platoon-mates—things like barrier or health or detection or whatever spells anchored to something like an amulet (or a squad-mate's helmet, for that matter). Costs time, nuyen and karma, of course ... but hey, it's cheaper in the long run than having your highly (and expensively) trained security personnel cut down by a street rat with a Saturday night special.)<<<<<

—Argent (10:23:57/5-21-56)

>>>>>(Argent's got it right. Had the bad luck to run into a fireteam of Azzie hard-men all packing magical drek like that: combined detect bullet/bullet barrier spells, detect grenade/blast barrier, and other wizzer little combinations. We almost bought the farm big-time.

We'd set up as an ambush, see? The Azzie hardboys come strolling down an alley and we cut 'em all down in one glorious bloodbath: autofire from three points, plus grenades. Omae, they just shrugged it off as all that magic kicked in. Sure, most of those spells were just one-shots, but it sure as hell stopped our first salvo from turning them into grease spots. Suddenly our ambush became a pitched battle—not what we wanted.)<<<<<

—Libbie (16:02:33/5-23-56)

MATRIX SECURITY

Rating: 8

Like most megacorporations, Aztechnology favors a complex, unevenly layered approach to Matrix security. Peripheral corporate systems have high security, while the central datacores in the Tenochtitlán HQ tend to have ultra-security. Typical benchmarks for security in representative nodes are as follows:

TYPICAL SECURITY BENCHMARKS TABLE

Node Type	Peripheral System	Core System
Dataline junctions, slave modules	Green-3 to Orange-1	Orange-1 to Orange-3
I/O Ports, low-security datastores and SPUs	Orange-2 to Red-1	Orange-4 to Red-2
CPUs, SPUs, SANs, and high-security datastores	Red-2 to Red-5	Red-3 to Red-8

To minimize system load, intrusion countermeasures are almost exclusively white and gray throughout peripheral systems. In core systems, black ice is the rule rather than the exception. Aztechnology considers it standard procedure to have deckers constantly patrolling sensitive subsystems.

>>>>>(Over the last couple of years, the Azzies seem to have discovered the wonders of adaptive ice ("knowbots") and cascading ice. In the main datacores, expect to scrap it out with expert system-driven ice (ripped off from Transys Neuronet; if anyone out there was involved in that run, me and my baseball bat would like to personally thank you) and multimode constructs the size of juggernauts. I haven't seen it myself, but some chummers have told me the Azzies either bought or otherwise acquired some wizzer new nasties from Lone Star's GridSec division—specifically, Escher loopers and data worms.)<<<<<

—Arclight (17:08:18/5-7-56)

PHYSICAL SECURITY

Rating: 7

Most people will never encounter ACS Matrix or magical personnel. In most parts of the world, however, it is rare to go more than a few days without seeing an Aztechnology security trooper. The tan-and-ochre ACS uniform is a common sight on the streets of most cities.

Reputation to the contrary, Aztechnology security personnel are not exceptionally well trained. Equivalent KE and Mitsuhama personnel, to give just two examples, are trained to be much more innovative in doing their jobs. Aztechnology personnel learn to handle situations "by the book," following an established SOP. This kind of training virtually guarantees that an Aztechnology security guard will always know what he or she *should* do in response to a situation, but it also allows anyone familiar with Aztechnology's SOP to use that knowledge against ACS personnel.

ACS tries to compensate for this weakness with improved arms and armor. In any given situation, Aztechnology personnel are almost always equipped with gear just a bit better than anyone else. For example, in a low-threat environment where KE personnel normally wear light body armor and carry machine pistols, an equivalent Aztechnology detachment might wear medium combat armor and carry assault shotguns.

>>>>>(Peace through superior firepower.)<<<<<
—Wild Bunny (07:18:19/5-12-56)

Elite Units

ACS includes two elite classes of troops, the so-called Leopard Guards and Jaguar Guards. Both are specially trained cadres skilled in special-forces actions. Almost all are Desert Wars veterans.

>>>>>(These slags wear pretty much the same uniforms as their normal comrades—a different shoulder-flash, but that's hard to spot in combat. Usually you can tell 'em a klick away from the self-satisfied, almost arrogant way they carry themselves.)<<<<<
—Jameson (11:45:21/5-9-56)

The Leopard Guards are roughly equivalent to Renraku's Red Samurai. According to some estimates, more than half of the Leopard Guards are cybernetically modified, and many of the remainder are physical adepts. Leopard Guards take charge of various high-sensitivity security duties throughout Aztechnology's worldwide business empire.

>>>>>(The Azzie pyramid in Seattle has a detachment of Leopard Guards protecting it.)<<<<<
—Carter (17:29:09/5-10-56)

>>>>>(I thought the Leopards were soldiers. Military units, not secguards.)<<<<<
—Macky (06:22:05/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Yes and no. The Leopards and the Jaguars look like soldiers, think like soldiers and act like soldiers. Hell, sometimes they even scrap it out with the Yucatán rebels or stand watch along the Thin Ochre Line around Austin. But on paper they're security guards under the auspices of the ACS.)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (10:34:14/5-11-56)

The Jaguar Guards are even more intensively trained than the Leopard Guards and are equipped with an even higher level of gear. If the Leopards are equivalent to the Red Samurai, the Jaguars are more akin to the Black Daggers in Tir Tairngire.

>>>>>(Wait just one tick here. In the TT file on Shadowland, didn't somebody explain that the Black Daggers were just an urban myth?)<<<<<
—Victor (10:01:34/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Since when did you start believing drek that slags like us append to files, huh?)<<<<<
—Wild Bunny (22:15:06/5-7-56)

>>>>>(The Black Daggers are an urban myth. But that doesn't stop Knight Errant from believing that drek.)<<<<<
—Gustav (00:58:43/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Do we have to replay this argument again? If you choose not to believe the Black Daggers exist, that's your right, your privilege, and quite possibly your funeral.)<<<<<
—Lady Sal (13:06:48/5-9-56)

Jaguar Guards never serve outside Aztlan. They guard high-sensitivity Aztechnology assets within the nation, such as the central HQ in Tenochtitlán, and often parade on various ceremonial occasions.

No one knows for certain how many Jaguar Guards ACS has within its ranks. KE estimates put the force at battalion strength, comprising four companies of three platoons each. Platoons are commanded by lieutenants, companies by captains. The Jaguar Guards battalion is commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Enrico Silva, nominally part of the ACS but actually seconded from the corporate military arm.

>>>>>(I don't savvy this military mickey-mouse. Battalion, platoon ... how many grunts with how many guns, that's what I want to know.)<<<<<
—Dogbreath (09:22:20/5-9-56)

CORPORATE AND NATIONAL MILITARY

>>>>>(And that's all they wrote. Enter Arctic White to spin the rest of the tale.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (14:53:04/5-1-56)

The nation of Aztlan has only 50,000 or so people under arms, but if you've been paying attention to the real world you know there's more than that manning the Thin Ochre Line around Austin. Guess where the others come from? Aztechnology. The corp has its own military organization, its own chain of command, its own TOE (Table of Organization and Equipment). And it has close to *150,000* people under arms. Though both forces put on a show of being independent entities, I'm here to tell you that's a crock.

Here's the true gen. The Azzie military—both sides—will *kill* you. End of line, end of story. That's what they *do*—kill people—and they're fragging good at it. Chummers, you might think you're pretty bitchin' drek, what with your heavy-security armor and your SPAS-22 combat shotgun, or maybe your Panther assault cannon. In your own back alley, you might be pretty fragging bitchin'. You can turn go-gangers into cat chow before they even register your presence. You can cap your typical corporate security force without much trouble. You're king of the fragging hill—but only until you get out there and mix it up with *real military*.

See, military don't come in ones and twos, like you and your sec-guard buddies. They come in fire teams, and squads, and platoons. They wear armor that'd give you wet dreams—most times sporting full tactical datanet support. They pack weapons you've never even *seen*. And the military folks know how to use their little toys. Alone and in combined arms operations, and using tactical doctrine that'll leave you shaking your head in confusion in the millisecond before you die.

Even mercs like me don't go toe-to-toe against full-on military. If we have to deal with them at all, we do it at long range, from heavy cover—and from the back, while they've got something else distracting them. Then we run. Fast.

>>>>>(Tox. Laying it on a bit thick, isn't he?)<<<<<
—Jumper (15:51:06/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Not a bit.)<<<<<
—Argent (10:35:10/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Ahh, he ain't nothin' but a wussy.)<<<<<
—Flashburn (00:15:05/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Never met Arctic White, have you?)<<<<<
—Argent (10:36:09/5-10-56)

Aztechnology's corporate military liaises with the national military machine as often as Aztechnology considers such cooperation necessary. Fortunately for those of us with nefarious purposes in mind, corporate and national military units just as often work at cross-purposes. (I keep hearing the buzz that some Leopard Guards (corp) seconded to the Yucatán tangled with a light-fighter company (national) somewhere in that area, and the two units kicked the holy living drek out of each other before anyone realized they were on the same side.) Don't bet your life on stuff like that happening just for your convenience, though. More often than not, Aztechnology's idea of "liaising" with the national military is usurping control—relieving the national CO of his command and dropping their own officers into the vacant spot. Not good for morale, but then Aztechnology officers consider the national military good cannon fodder and not much else.

EQUIPMENT

Most of the heavy drek is in the mitts of the national army. So what do the corp doggies get to play with?

Lucky, lucky corp doggies. They get all the wiz stuff. Two examples. A Vindicator on a gyro-mount is considered *light fire support* for a top-of-the-line battle-trained trooper. And remember how freaked you felt when you first heard about Ares's MP-Laser pulse laser systems? Well, various heavy infantry units around the world have been playing with *continuous-beam* laser units for a couple of years now. The nationals get the big blunt objects; the corp dogfaces get the high-tech drek, the stuff that needs more brains to put to good use.

Analogy time: give the nationals the big motherfragging maces and axes, give the corp soldiers the rapiers. The latter are harder to use well, but potentially much more effective. Take the "future trooper" concept, for example. Entire units of doggies—ground-pounders—are out there wearing heavy mil-spec armor crosslinked with high-spy sensor drones downloading realtime data to their tactical units, ready to blow the drek out of anything that needs it with Ballista man-pack missile launchers. Those units are all wearing Aztlan uniforms, but for political reasons only. They're all Aztechnology personnel, under direct Aztechnology command. An Aztlan general can tell 'em to do something, but they'll wait to move until their *own* CO tells them "Simon says."

:::::**[WORDSMYTH] A situation that could easily be manipulated to one's benefit.**

:::::**[JUNGLE CAT] Very true.**

MAJOR BASES

Aztlan's major military bases are: Ensenada (no drek!), Matamoros, Manchaca (just south of Austin), El Paso, San Diego, and Hermosillo in the north; Mazatlán, Veracruz, Puebla, and Oaxaca in the central regions; Progreso and Campeche in the Yucatán; and Panamá, Cartagena, and Cali down south.

ORGANIZATION

Okay, here's my best crack at the skinny on the 50,000-or-so strong Aztlan Armed Forces. The national army makes no administrative distinction between army, navy, and air force, so

I don't have hard figures about how they break down. My best guess is about 35,000 ground pounders, 10,000 squids, and close to 5,000 zoomies. Maybe 40 percent of those 50,000 are noncombatants—support personnel, administrative types, data-pushers, cooks, mechanics, computer wonks, and so on. So maybe you've got about 30,000 boys and girls out there on the pointy end, in harm's way.

>>>>>(Chummer, that's fragged. No way that can be right. There's more than 30,000 grunts glaring over the Aztlan-CAS line within 300 klicks of where I'm sitting right now. And that doesn't include the Pueblo border, the San Diego zone, or the fragging Yucatán.)<<<<<

—Nikchick (16:09:15/5-4-56)

>>>>>(How many of those grunts are wearing Aztlan uniforms? Aztechnology uniforms? Get the point? Aztlan the nation has 50,000 people under arms. Aztechnology, on the other hand, has maybe triple that number. Pay attention. I don't like repeating myself.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (11:25:30/5-5-56)

Ground Forces

The majority of Aztlaner national ground units are mechanized infantry, supported where necessary by heavy armor. National forces are generally assigned to hold a line of battle or deliver a heavy punch to shatter a defensive line. Tactical mobility is emphasized over operational mobility. The only exception is in the case of specially trained and equipped Operational Maneuver Groups (an idea lifted from the pre-*glasnost* Soviets, as a matter of fact). These guys still pack one heavy fragging punch, but they're fast as drek through a goose as well.

The national forces control most of the country's main battle tanks and tactical surface-to-surface missiles, and just about fragging all of its tube artillery. (Oh yeah, tube artillery. Don't let anyone tell you it's obsolete. The Texas Rangers learned that lesson the painful way. "Obsolete" howitzers firing laser-guided projectiles from over the horizon tore the holy living drek out of the Texans' heavy armor.)

Naval Forces

Aztlan has a "frigate navy." It doesn't maintain aircraft carriers, strategic missile subs, or large battleships. Okay, it does have a bunch of frigates, destroyers, and patrol boats—and even a couple of fast-attack subs roughly equivalent to old 688-class boats. It's not badly set up when it comes to coastal defense. (The 688 boats alone can make life interesting—and quite short—for anyone who trails his coat in Azzie territorial waters.) But it can't project force worth squat.

Even with the addition of Aztechnology-flagged units, the picture doesn't change that much. My personal feeling is that Aztlan/Aztechnology has ignored the naval aspect of the military equation. But then, they never asked me.

Air Forces

Aztlan's following a definite procurement philosophy when it comes to air assets. It doesn't follow the old U.S. approach—buy relatively few birds, but make them the most cutting-edge you can lay mitts on—or the old Soviet style—procure *buckets* of lower-tech birds. As a result, Aztlan doesn't have a large air force, or a bleeding-edge high-tech one. What it does have is a moderate number of rock-solid, reliable birds. In the short term, you might make Aztlan hurt because their birds can't lock yours up or can't catch them or outclimb them. But over the long haul, they'll grind you into the ground through maintenance turnaround. Your high-tech beauties are going to be under the wrench two hours for every hour they fly. Aztlan's will be under the wrench one hour for every *two* they fly. Eventually, they'll eat your lunch.

Again, Aztlan's goal seems not to project force, but to protect turf. Aztlan doesn't have any strategic or theater bombers. Its ground attack birds don't have the "legs" for long missions (obviously, they're tasked to pounding the drek out of an invading force, rather than supporting an Azzie invasion force). It goes in more for interceptors—short-legged babies designed for scrapping it up with inbound raiders. Which is more or less the opposite ideology to Aztechnology's approach. Makes for a nice match.

Space Forces

Aztlan doesn't have any national military space assets. None. No spysats, no killsats, no FOBS birds, no Thor bundles.

It doesn't have to. Aztechnology more than picks up the slack in that area.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE

Aztlan "jobs out" its intelligence-gathering to Aztechnology (lovely thought, *neh*?). Intelligence-gathering in all its many forms falls under the auspices of the Aztechnology military—even industrial espionage, as I understand it. So if you take a contract to support another corp's site security, the guys trying to come in over the wire might well be Leopard Guards. Or worse. General Paolo Batiste is the slag in charge of the military intelligence arm over at Aztechnology. He's got an office in the Tenochtitlán pyramid, but nobody knows quite where.

>>>>>(You're behind the times, Whitey. Batiste was "called home by the Plumed Serpent" a month back. Don't know who's got the hot seat these days.)<<<<<

—Kevin (12:19:42/5-19-56)

>>>>>(Hey, did that Batiste guy cack it in the "shakeup" somebody mentioned at the beginning of this post?)<<<<<

—Caveat (14:03:56/5-19-56)

>>>>>(According to my research, the shakeup went down about three months ago. Four high-ranking Intel boys bought it, for reasons nobody's saying nothing about. Here's a tidbit for those of us interested in Espectro's identity: around the same time the drek hit the fan, the wife of one of these slags disappeared. At first I thought the Azzies had gotten her, too, but I found out she left the country. Don't know where she went ... but about six weeks after she left, Shadowland got what we're reading right now.

I think I found Espectro, folks (a moment of silence, please).)<<<<<

—Little Jo (00:03:45/5-22-56)

[Meta]Human Intelligence Operatives

I don't know how many case officers (I prefer the word "spies") Aztechnology has on the payroll. Too damn many, probably. Because they work for Aztechnology rather than Aztlan, they don't make much distinction between military/political investigation and industrial espionage. If they're on the prowl for a certain class of paydata and they accidentally stumble across something unrelated but potentially interesting, they know enough to recognize its value. (Much more efficient than intelligence setups that make a distinction between industrial/economic and military/political intelligence. Where the frag's the difference nowadays?)

Aztechnology's counterespionage assets are also pretty fragging hot. I can't confirm this, but I've heard that Aztechnology hired a drekload of ex-KGB pros back when the Soviet Union blew up for the second time. Aztechnology has a specialized "executive action" team of assassins who report to the counterespionage chief. (Sorry, I don't know who that counterespionage chief is.)

Other Intelligence-Gathering Assets

I've always considered people the best tools for intelligence-gathering operations. Case officers can interpret as well as observe; they can give you a picture of an opponent's intention as well as his capabilities. If you can get a case officer on to a target site, you'll get *much* more reliable intelligence. However, that's not always possible. To compensate, Aztechnology uses other methods: principally, electronic intelligence (ELINT) and surveillance satellites.

Chummers, I've never seen a corp or military agency with ELINT as slick as Aztechnology's. The Azzies have electronic "listening posts" all over the fragging globe. As a matter of course they listen in on cellular links, broadband comm channels, anything and everything that goes out over the airwaves. (Because most of that drek is encrypted to some degree, even cell-phone calls, it makes sense that the Azzies have the hottest decrypt artists outside the Vatican.)

Over the past few years, the Azzies have been busting their hoops trying to compromise the fiber-optic land lines that most corps and many national governments use these days. That's a long-term project, though—costly in terms of nuyen and "expended assets" (geeked spooks), but the potential payoff is huge.

>>>>>(Hey, I'm calling buildrek on you there. You can't compromise fiber-optic lines. Period.)<<<<<

—Vantage (13:01:46/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Does someone else want to tell him, or shall I?)<<<<<

—TS (17:12:28/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Stress something Whitey posted. As a matter of course, Aztechnology listens in on cellular communications: all cellular communications. They get particularly interested in high-bandwidth channels, like the ones used by you decker-types with cellular links in your cyberdecks. Sure, the Azzies can't listen in on every call all the time. But assume they're listening in on you every time you fire up your cell phone and plan accordingly.)<<<<<

—Argent (22:15:57/5-10-56)

Aztechnology has surveillance satellites, a drekpot load of them. Visible light, IR, radar, the whole enchilada. If the atmospherics are good, LEO (low Earth orbit) camera systems can resolve images down to the size of a paperback book. (No, you *can't* read the title ...) Aztechnology uses these satellites to keep a close eye on enemies, rivals, potential competitors, and its *own* personnel. (Hot flash for Seattle-ites ... bet you didn't know the Azzie pyramid is always in the surveillance footprint of *three*—count 'em, *three*—Azzie satellites.)

:::::**[THE BIG 'D'] Quiet? Very well ...**

WARRIORS

Now *here's* an interesting little quirk in the military: the concept of "warriors," known as *guerreros*. I'll admit I didn't quite scan the idea when I first heard about it. I thought maybe warriors referred to certain units and denoted a mark of respect or elite status. Or maybe the word referred to the Aztlan version of decorations—medals, commendations, and the like—awarded to individual soldiers (like letting some slub call himself "Jaguar Warrior" instead of giving him a Silver Star or some such drek).

Wrong, on both counts. It's something like both, but like neither. (Curious?)

The Azzie military contains four "orders" of warriors. As far as I can tell, they're historical in origin—nothing New-Agey

made up on the spur just for effect. The orders are—in rough order of increasing jam—Jaguar, Eagle, *Otontin*, and *Quachic* , or "Shorn Ones." (Despite the name of that last group, only some of its members go for the shaved-head-and-braid look. It's not obligatory.)

You'll find warriors of different orders scattered throughout the Aztlaner military. They don't form exclusive units or concentrate in a single branch of the service. You're just as likely to find a smattering of warriors—of all orders—in a front-line ground pounder unit as you are in an elite air-defense squadron. Warriors wear the uniforms of whatever unit they're serving with, but they *always* wear a shoulder flash or similar emblem to identify their warrior order. You'll find warriors of all ranks, too. *Quachic* infantry privates, Jaguar general officers, and everything in between. It's kinda weird, though. Just being a warrior gives them some kind of additional jam, independent of rank. Dogface privates are going to pay more attention to a fellow private who happens to be an *Otontin* than they are to their sergeant (which has got to *seriously* pick the sergeant).

So what's the significance of warriors? The four orders are kind of like "military-social clubs." If you're an Eagle warrior, you get to hang with other Eagle warriors. You can eat in an Eagle mess with others of your kind, you can drink in an Eagle bar. When you're on leave, you can doss down in Eagle "transient officers quarters." You get to attend mucho mysterioso private "lodge meetings" (and *no*, I don't know what goes on at them). And you get to bask in the knowledge that if anyone slots with you, they've slotted with the entire order of Eagle warriors.

Those lodge meetings I talked about? They tend to take place at least once a month, typically on the full moon or the new moon. I don't know what goes on in them—whether they're just booze-chip-and-bimbo fests or weirdo rituals of some kind—but knights seem to go to great lengths to attend them when they can. They must be freaky—snot-nosed doggies rubbing shoulders with elite fighter jocks, zipperheads, and all kinds of officers.

>>>>>(Zipperheads?)<<<<<
— Low Ranger (14:20:47/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Tank crews. When you're in a redballing tank, winding it out over uneven ground, at some point in your career you're going to bounce your skull off something hard and sharp—a hatch hinge, your main gun's breech, whatever. It's going to lay your scalp open to the bone, and you're going to have to have the wound sutured shut. Hence, "zipperheads.")<<<<<
—Beowulf (00:53:30/5-9-56)

Membership

How do you become a warrior? Fragged if I know, chummer. (*I* never got an invite.) The way I understand it, historically—in the Aztec nation—you got to be a warrior if you were conspicuously valiant in some way. You take a drekload of captives—for eventual sacrifice to the gods, of course—or you pull your chummers' hoops out of the fire a couple dozen times, you *might* get the nod to join an order. Now?

Like I said, fragged if I know. Some warriors have already distinguished themselves as kick-butt soldiers before they're invited to join the secret treehouse. These guys are the killer veterans with the drekhot reps. So doesn't that imply membership is granted on merit? Not so, boys and girls. For each hard-hooped, steely eyed veteran who's asked to join, there's one or two snot-nosed recruits whose biggest achievement in the military so far is finding their bunks. One thing I've noticed is that all warriors, regardless of order, are combat soldiers, sailors, or pilots—no administrative pukes, no REMFs, no datapushers.

>>>>>(REMFs?)<<<<<
—Low Ranger (14:23:05/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Rear Echelon Mother-Fraggers. The guys who cack up missions for the guys out on the pointy end.)<<<<<
—Beowulf (00:56.45/5-9-56)

Oh yeah, one other thing. Far as I know, all *guerreros* are pure Aztlaners, born and bred. All born in-country, with parents who were citizens. I don't know how far the "blood" has to go back for you to qualify for membership. (Grandparents? Great grandparents? Dunno.) All I know is *I* don't qualify.

Different Orders

The different orders of warriors have very different personalities. (I've fought alongside some of them, and I know.)

Generally speaking, Jaguar warriors are bad news—glory hounds who'll get themselves (and possibly *you*) killed while trying to do something courageous.

Eagle warriors are the most in-your-face when it comes to "order" pride. If you slot off a single *Otontin*, a dozen of his buds are going to seek you out and kick your sorry behind. If you slot off a single Eagle *guerrero*, he and his buds are going to seek you out and geek you.

Quachic tend to be the quiet, intense types, more or less—that whole "Zen warrior" type trip, if you know what I mean. The kind of slub who'll recite an ancient poem or quote Clausewitz while he's ripping your lungs out.

And the *Otontin?* Well, they're just not like the others. Now I think about it, I don't know much about those chummers at all.

As far as I'm concerned, the warriors aren't going to make much difference to you one way or another ... as long as you don't get on their bad side. Rule of thumb: don't get into a hash with any Azzie trooper with a weird shoulder flash on his uniform. Other than that, I figure they're just another one of those things that makes Aztlan such a freak show.

>>>>>(Goes to show what you know, Whitey. Can't figure out what all the guerreros have in common? I'll spell it out for you. M-A-G-I-C. They're all mages or shamans, every last slot.

This is just speculation, but I'd lay cred that the "orders of warriors" are actually initiatory groups. And the orders have their own heirarchy: the higher they are, the badder they come, and the scarier the rituals they use to power their magic.)<<<<<
—Jones (10:21:06/5-7-56)

>>>>>(You're talking entire orders of combat mages?)<<<<<
—Arctic White (08:20:00/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Not necessarily "combat mages" the way you're thinking it. They're mages (or shamans) and they go into combat. But I'm not saying their magical talents run in the standard fireball-and-manabolt rut. Not necessarily—in fact, not likely. They've all got a little something extra going for them, something that puts them one step beyond.)<<<<<
—Jones (10:02:43/5-8-56)

>>>>>(So why? What's the fragging point, then? I just plumb don't scan it.)<<<<<
—Arctic White (15:45:50/5-8-56)

>>>>>(A way of improving army morale and loyalty, maybe? All the warriors I've ever met are "true believers"—real hard-cores when it comes to "Aztlan, right or wrong," neh? Maybe the orders of guerreros are super-loyal cadres—a kind of morale-based reinforcing structure for the entire military, with the magical cojones to make their point loud and clear.)<<<<<
—Jones (15:47:16/5-8-56)

>>>>>(They've all got links to Aztechnology. All the warriors.)<<<<<
—Pyramid Watcher (15:49:09/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Honto? I'll check into that.)<<<<<
—Jones (15:50:47/5-8-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Interesting and interesting.

:::::[HECATE] We all knew it was only a matter of time before that tradition was revived among the less insightful.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] And it isn't as if we haven't done it already and given them something to emulate.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I know. I'm just beginning to see an interesting trend that I had not expected to see.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Of what?

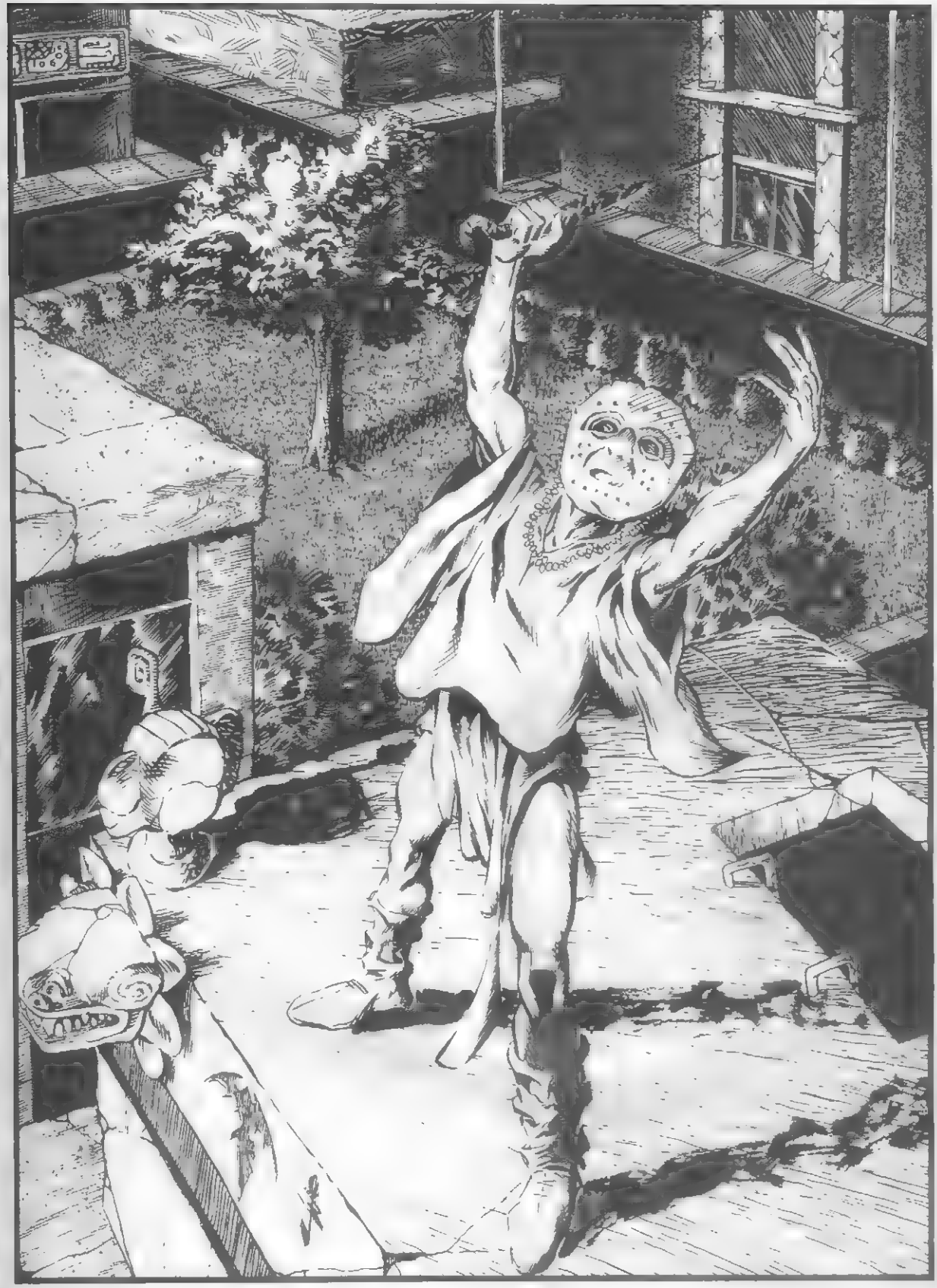
:::::[WORDSMYTH] Awareness.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] <sigh> Okay, dragon, maybe this was necessary ...

RELIGION AND MAGIC

In usual circumstances, a discussion of a foreign nation's religion has no place in a governmental briefing. In the case of Aztlan, however, certain circumstances make the following discussion relevant.

First, the religion most widely practiced in Aztlan is a state-sponsored faith. State endorsement of religion has fallen into disfavor throughout the rest of the world, but remains a significant reality in Aztlan. Through religion, the Aztlan government has attained a degree of control over its people that the UCAS and other more enlightened nations cannot match.



:::::[WORDSMYTH] Hence the reduction of religious shackles in the rest of the enlightened world.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Faith, as corrupt as the human hand may have made it, is one of those rare things that lets a person see the world not as a place of random chaos and indiscriminate loss, but one that through the heartache and grief has a purpose beyond the tragedy of the here and now. The decline of faith has stolen hope from the human race.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I am surprised by those words coming from you.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] We, all of us here and the others, have striven to weaken the hold of faith on the human heart for generations, so that when magic returned they might be more open to it and embrace it more quickly. I believe we have made a terribe mistake.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I don't understand.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Their loss of faith has let them see the world as a cold place built on manipulable formulae and devoid of Meaning. They are no longer afraid of the universe.

:::::[UMSONDO] I sense a confusion of faith and a sense of purpose on the one hand with religious belief on the other. This is an elementary stupidity. You do well to mention fear, wyrm. It has too often been the weapon of those who had the hold on the human heart that you speak of—and used that hold to shrivel, weaken, and pervert courage and curiosity, strength and valor, all the better to maintain their own authority and position. There are always growing pains; without pains there will be no growth. I am proud of where I Walk.

Second, the suppressed Catholic Church is a potential nucleus around which popular dissatisfaction and even insurrection may develop, or be encouraged to develop. (This situation is analogous to the rise of Catholic political power in the so-called Iron Curtain countries near the end of the 20th century, which helped bring about the fall of Communism.)

Third, a strong link appears to exist between the official Aztlan religion and the generation of localized paranatural energies, though we do not yet understand the mediating mechanism or being involved. The same cannot be said for any other religion, as far as we know. (Potential counter examples include the Native American Nations, but upon closer examination the mechanisms used are explicable by standard theories of paranatural energy mechanics—viz., the Great Ghost Dance.)

>>>>>("Paranatural energy mechanics?" Why can't the slot just say "magic?")<<<<<

—Raiko (17:26:06/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Are government analysts paid by the word ... ?)<<<<<

—Bung (20:31:32/5-10-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] So the increased potential of the area is being managed—it's not natural?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] As I feared. It explains much.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Preposterous.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Really? It has been done before.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] By those far more powerful in an environment far more conducive to such behavior. Here? Now? Spare me.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] You denied the danger of the Spike Point.

This briefing provides a preliminary overview of the Aztlan religion, its structure, and its core tenets. Note that this discussion is far from exhaustive. Deeper analysis appears in other, related reports.

DEITIES

In the Aztlaner tongue, the state religion is referred to as "The Path of the Sun." A pantheistic faith, it reveres many deities, most drawn directly from ancient Aztec myths and legends. Temples (*teocalli*) are usually dedicated to a single deity, and multiple temples are scattered throughout the nation. Priests (often called by the Spanish word *sacerdote*) generally dedicate themselves to a single deity as well, though a few priests seem to serve multiple deities.

>>>>>(Not so much different deities as different manifestations of the same deity. The old Aztec gods used to shift things around like lovers at an orgy. They'd change responsibilities (like "god of water"), and they'd sometimes appear in different sexes or other guises. In most cases, if your priest seems to be worshipping more than one god, he or she is actually worshipping the same deity in different aspects. Here's an example for free. Ometéotl is a relatively minor deity these days (used to be the Creator, which you'd think would be heavy drek ... but things change). Sometimes Ometéotl appears as Ometecutli ("the male creator") and sometimes as Omechihuatl ("the female creator"). Different strokes for different aspects, you might say.

Oh yeah, and one more thing. In all my research, I've never seen the old Aztec religion referred to as the "Path of the Sun." My scan? That's a latter-day addition—a wizzer little bit of marketing to help sell it to the yokels.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (09:17:51/5-10-56)

:::::[HECATE] A deliberate connection to the Tír na nÓg Paths, perhaps.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] If so, it is a corruption.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Could there be a connection?

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Not unless one of us is over there showing them how to do things. I think we know how unlikely that is.

:::::[HECATE] True.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] But something of knowledge is at work here. I've sensed it.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You are perceptive.

The table below lists the major deities of the Path of the Sun and their presumed areas of responsibility ("major" in this case implying that a large *teocalli* somewhere in Tenochtitlán is dedicated to the deity in that aspect).

AZTLAN DEITIES TABLE

Deity	Responsibility
Huitzilopochtli	War; the sun
Quetzalcóatl	Knowledge; wind; hunter and warrior; patron of wizards and thieves
Tezcatlipoca	Fate and confessions; spring and renewals; learning
Tlaloc	Agriculture; rain
Xiutecutli	Fire

Many other, minor deities are worshipped in smaller *teocalli* throughout the nation. Of all the deities worshipped in Aztlan, the most important is Quetzalcóatl.

>>>>>(Can I ask a question (or is Argent going to jump down my throat)?

Who cares? What the frag does it matter anyway? Gods? This is 2056. Cut me a break, here.)<<<<<

—Timothee (09:10:09/5-16-56)

>>>>>(No, boyo, it's me who's going to jump down your throat this time.

Who cares? You should. And not only for the familiar (very good) reason of, "Know the culture where you're working." If the people of Aztlan believe in these gods, or pretend to, you're at a serious disadvantage if you don't know what they're babbling about. Makes it just that much harder to predict their reactions and figure out their weaknesses.

There's also the very real fact that there's ... well, I can't get it across without sounding melodramatic, so I'll just go for it. There's something going on in those temples.

Timothee, either you're no mystic (shaman or hermetic) or you've never been to Denver or Aztlan. Something is definitely happening in those *teocalli*. Assense one of them sometime (or get a friend to do it). Chummer, they're pouring out so much mojo it hurts. Looking at one from the astral plane is like trying to look into a fragging searchlight. That's enough to tell me this "Path of the Sun" isn't just some empty superstition.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (12:47:18/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Are you claiming that Tlaloc, god of fragging drizzles, is real ... ? Like the man said: cut me a break.)<<<<<

—Keating (16:18:20/5-17-56)

>>>>>("Real" as in "the god who causes rain all over the fragging world, and who you can pray to before a picnic?" Of course not, you slot. But "real" as in "something symbolic around which a drekload of mana is being manipulated?" Bet your hoop.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (11:04:23/5-18-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Finally, some insight.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You are ignoring what is important.

:::::[HECATE] That the Aztlaners are conducting rituals in their temples?? Isn't that what they're for??

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Have you ever assensed one of their teocalli? The degree in power in some of them is astounding.

:::::[HECATE] So they're conducting blood rites and figured out the right way to do it. We have no worries for some time.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You said that before the Great Ghost Dance.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] That event should not have caused us problems. It should not have happened to begin with. We should find out from Coleman who taught him.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] There are two possibilities— they are being taught the ancient blood rites, or they are figuring them out for themselves. Is either less frightening?

TEMPLES

Every village, town, and city in Aztlan has at least one *teocalli*, and most have several. Tenochtitlán, for example, has five major *teocalli* and countless smaller ones. Tiny *teocalli* are also sometimes established at major crossroads.

>>>>>(If you drive the major autoroutes, you'll see 'em. Itty-bitty pyramids, built by the side of the fragging road. Sometimes people give you directions based on 'em. "Head north on Autoroute 49 past Jiménez, then cut a left at the *teocalli* of Yaotl." Wiz, means a lot to me ...)<<<<<

—Sharktooth (00:25:05/5-11-56)

Traditional *teocalli* are built in the familiar Mesoamerind stepped-pyramid style, with a "sanctuary" (a small single room or shelter) in the center of the topmost level. Within this sanctuary is an image of the deity to which the *teocalli* is dedicated—hand-carved of stone in the largest temples, cast or milled from standard polymers in the smaller.

Historically, *teocalli* had no internal chambers; they were constructed of piles of stones or rubble, faced with dressed stone. In modern-day Aztlan, all but the smallest *teocalli* are constructed similarly to standard buildings, though in the traditional stepped-pyramid style. The most important *teocalli* are faced with real stone; most, however, are built of common materials such as ferrocrete, ceramic laminates, and structural composites. The major *teocalli* in downtown Tenochtitlán face out on to open squares, areas used for religious ceremonies and observances.

In most cases, the priests who serve the *teocalli* live and work within the temple. Those attached to smaller temples with no internal structure live in nearby residential blocks. Oddly enough, the larger temples in Aztlan's major cities double as armories for the military, Aztechnology corporate security forces, and other paramilitary organizations.

>>>>>(Not so odd if you read your history. In the way-old days, the citizenry didn't have access to weapons on a day-to-day basis (except for hunting crap like blowguns). The heavy gear—obsidian swords and the like—was all salted away in "Houses of Darts" (tlacochcalcos), which were usually located right next to the temples. When it was time to go to war, the powers-that-be cracked open the Houses of Darts and distributed the toys to the waiting warriors.)<<<<<

—Nutter (19:09:01/5-9-56)

>>>>>(You telling me if I want to pick up some wizzer bang-bangs, all I have to do is knock over a temple? Priests ... be afraid!)<<<<<

—Chance (21:08:11/5-20-56)

>>>>>(Read on, slot. You might want to rethink who'd better be afraid.)<<<<<

—Argent (09:14:46/5-21-56)

THE PRIESTHOOD

This briefing examines three aspects of the priesthood of the Path of the Suns: the Emperor, the rank-and-file clergy, and the magically active within the clergy.

THE EMPEROR

In the ancient Aztec empire, the primate or head of the priesthood—called the emperor—served as head of state, commander-in-chief of the military, and high priest of the Path of the Sun. The emperor officiated at major ceremonies and personally conducted important sacrifices, tearing out the hearts of sacrificial victims with his own hands.

The modern nation of Aztlan has become a federal república, with an elected president rather than a hereditary absolute ruler. Some of the ancient traditions, however, are still maintained. Officially and traditionally, the incumbent president of Aztlan is deemed the "emperor" and the head of the priesthood: the *Huey Tlatoani*, or "Revered Speaker." This position makes all priests throughout the Aztlan nation officially subordinate to the president.

>>>>>(Chummer of mine actually got an audience with the prez awhile back. (The prez thought my bud was a rep from Saeder-Krupp who was coming to kiss up to Aztlan. Her problem if she's too brain-fragged to do her research beforehand—the prez, I mean.) Anyhow, my chummer got this kind of lecture about protocol. The way he told me, how you're supposed to address the prez depends on why you're there and what "role" the prez is playing at the time. Like for example, if you're talking pure politics or economics or whatever, she's Señora Presidente or some such drek—"Ms. President." Chill.

But if she's talking to you as emperor (empress?)—head of the fragging priesthood—you're supposed to call her that Huey something this screed just mentioned. Huey Tlatoani. And you're supposed to bow your fragging head and not look her in the eyes, and kiss up to her big-time. You're not supposed to wear shoes when you go in to see her, and the first thing you're supposed to say to her is "Lord, my Lord, my Great Lord" ... or they'll lop your fragging head off.

Good thing it wasn't me going to see her. I'd have laughed till I yarfed.)<<<<<

—Dogbreath (21:19:15/5-13-56)

>>>>>(And that's another of the weird fragging incongruities you'll run into if you hang in Aztlan. In some ways, it's a contemporary society with its eye on the future. In others, it's got one foot firmly stuck in the ancient past. Sometimes I figure you need a split personality to really understand Aztlan or its people.)<<<<<

—Holly (18:16:57/5-14-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I had not recognized the implications of this. Is the Huey Tlatoani a ceremonial title, or does it carry real power?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] We have seen no evidence that any of the presidents of Aztlan have been magically active or aware. I suspect it is simply ceremonial.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] But then who holds the real position?

RANK-AND-FILE CLERGY

The clergy constitutes a surprisingly large subsection of Aztlan's population. In Tenochtitlán alone there are more than 25,000 members of the clergy. Throughout the entire nation there are perhaps 120,000 priests of various levels.

The church is monolithic and hierarchical, surprisingly similar in structure to the Catholic Church that the Aztlan government suppressed as a "dangerous cultural force." The central headquarters of the Path of the Sun is the Great Temple, the *teocalli* dedicated to Quetzalcóatl in the center of Tenochtitlán. Within this temple serves the head of the entire clerical hierarchy, the High Priest of Quetzalcóatl. Beneath him (or her) are the High Priest of Huitzilopochtli and the High Priest of Tlaloc. These three individuals are the ritual leaders of the entire Aztlan state religion.

Some experts argue that these three positions are largely symbolic, and that the real power lies with the so-called Vicar General in charge of the religion's administrative functions. The Vicar General appoints all subordinate priests, picking suitable individuals from the many candidates who apply for membership in the clergy, and maintains programs to educate all Aztlan citizens in the function of the state religion.

:::::[HECATE] Is this "Vicar General" the Huey Tlatoani ?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Unlikely. A few of these have been magically active, but even they have been too vulnerable to truly be the Emperor of the Sun.

Beneath the Vicar General is a hierarchical structure familiar to any corporate manager. Members of the clergy advance in rank through demonstrations of "efficiency": maximizing observance of religious ceremonies, increasing donations to the various temples, and so on. All members of the clergy are supported by public funds. They live in quarters provided by the temples, and all reasonable expenses are absorbed by the religious hierarchy. (Predictably, the definition of "reasonable" varies greatly depending on the rank an individual holds within the hierarchy.)

>>>>>(Oh yeah, no drek. Your typical small-town priest, running a punky little *teocalli* to meaningless deities (like the Ciuateteo, maybe) lives like a low-level sararíman: a one-room-plus-drekker apartment and enough money to eat (poorly). When you get way up in the structure, though—up to the Major Clerk, one of the slubs right below the Vicar General—you're talking a lifestyle that megacorp senior suits might envy. Big dosses, the best food, flash clothes, all the bimbos (or himbos) you can boff, you name it—all in the Name of Religion. Chummer, it's good work if you can get it.)<<<<<

—Morales (22:46:19/5-5-56)

>>>>>(And if you don't mind knowing that you're a parasite on the culture. A philosophical liver fluke.)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (11:15:36/5-7-56)

Magically Active Priests

Aztlaner culture is famous for the number of powerful shamans and hermetics (primarily the former) that it produces. Understandably, many people assume that all Aztlan priests are shamans, and vice versa. The truth is quite different. Shamans, including some staggeringly powerful individuals, undeniably exist within the clergy. However, the proportion of magically active priests is less than 20 percent—much higher than the average incidence in the general population, but still indicative of the fact that magical activity and membership in the clergy are not directly linked.

This section discusses the results of CIA computer modeling of paranatural activity among Aztlaner clergy. Though the algorithms used for the analysis are dependable 99.995 percent of the time, these algorithms assume a degree of accuracy in the raw data that cannot be confirmed. Therefore, the conclusions, though definitely indicative, cannot be considered definitive. The major conclusions are as follows.

- Distributions of hermetically and shamanically active individuals indicates the existence of suborganizations within the clergy.
- The analysis indicates the existence of two distinct initiatory groups within the clergy: one hermetic, the other shamanic.
- Of these two groups, the hermetic initiatory order seems capable of a significantly higher degree of initiation. (This may be a reflection of objective "power," in whatever sense this word may be used, or may simply indicate that the hermetic order has existed longer.)

Our analyses indicate that the existence of these initiatory groups is known only to members of the clergy who have risen significantly through the ranks. It is assumed that the "front-line" priests—the individuals who provide religious services to lay citizens—are unaware that such initiatory orders exist.

>>>>>(What's that quote again? "Lies, damned lies, statistics, and computer modeling"?)<<<<<

—Oddjob (20:09:02/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, but if you've actually hung for awhile down in Aztlan, you'll know that explanation just feels right. There's something creepy going on. Mutually exclusive, secret initiatory orders are as good an explanation as I've heard yet.)<<<<<

—Lykes (06:47:45/5-10-56)

>>>>>(There is no doubt in my mind that something is occurring within the so-called temples. It is a reflection on the blindness of my people and their superstitious gullibility that they assume the occurrences result from this false "Aztec religion." To anyone with enough sense to critically analyze the situation, it is clear that all the supposedly "holy" miracles are actually magical in origin. The state religion is a sham, a guise behind which to hide a high level of magical experimentation and activity.)<<<<<

—Matador (10:39:08/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Personally, I think you're taking it a little far ... but I can understand why you think that way.)<<<<<

—Cutter John (14:15:26/5-17-56)

>>>>>(I don't scan this at all. What the frag's going down? Religion is a null program, right? It's just pure superstition and self-delusion. Neh?)<<<<<

—Dirt Merchant (20:11:29/5-18-56)

>>>>>(Normally I'd agree with you. But you've got to understand how this is all shaking out.

As an example, let's take the belief structure of another religion: the currently suppressed Catholic Church. In the Catholic faith, when the Host—the little circle of unleavened bread—is put on the altar during the Mass, it turns into the Body of Christ through the Miracle of Transubstantiation. Are you with me so far?

'Kay. Let's say you put all kinds of sensors around that Host on the altar to detect the transubstantiation. Chemsniffers, thermometers, Geiger counters, whatever, plus a mage or shaman to watch it from the astral.

So what if nothing happens, if none of your sensors or whatever pick up any evidence of change? You reach two possible conclusions. One: nothing happened, so the whole thing is buildrek. Two: the importance of transubstantiation is purely symbolic, so it doesn't matter whether anything physical happens or not.

So what if something does happen? Sure, your chemsniffers may not tell you that the bread has suddenly turned to animal tissue, but what if the mage or shaman sees something astral happening around the host? Suddenly you've got to approach the "miracle" from a totally different standpoint, neh?

And the fact that something is causing the Aztlan *teocalli* to glow like fragging arclights definitely falls into that category.)<<<<<

—Araq (23:15:25/5-20-56)

>>>>>(While we're at it, let's toss something even more controversial into the mix. There's a close link between the top dogs of the Path of the Sun and Aztechnology—a real close link.

Before you start climbing all over me, accept that I've done my research. (Want to check my data trail? Contact me by e-mail, and I'll flip the files your way.) You know how all the priests are supported by public funds: donations by the faithful, supplemented by tax money? The four top dogs in the church—the High Priests of Quetzalcóatl, Huitzilopochtli, and Tlaloc, and the Vicar General—live a very sweet lifestyle on revenue from the general coffers. In addition, deep under the table, they collect payoffs in cred, goods, and "services" (yes, that's precisely what I mean) directly from Aztechnology. Those four top dogs also meet regularly with high-level Aztechnology suits—biz meetings where they're closeted away together for hours, sometimes even days. (Chummers, I'd gut my mother to find out what goes on in those long meetings ...)

To make it even more twisted, those same top dogs are among the most kick-butt mystics anywhere in the world. Not shamans, not followers of the Plumed Serpent like you might expect. Hermetics, mondo nui hermetics. I think.)<<<<<

—Dobu (11:32:38/5-21-56)

>>>>>(Hm. Interesting. Dobu, I've looked over the data you sent me (thanks for the fast response), and I can't argue with your conclusions. There is definitely a link between the state religion and Aztechnology. If anybody can dig up more dirt on this, post it here. My curiosity's piqued.)<<<<<

—Doc (15:19:45/5-23-56)

:::::[HECATE] So the spiritual leaders of the Path of the Sun bow to the powers at Aztechnology. I had thought the corporation's control purely political and economic.

FORMS OF WORSHIP

Worship as part of the Path of the Sun mainly consists of attending and observing rituals and festivals conducted by the priests. In all but the smallest towns, at least one *teocalli* ritual is performed every day. Not everyone is expected to attend every festival or ritual; if they were, nothing could ever be accomplished in the nation. Many of the less significant rituals are attended as a mark of respect by those who have nothing better to do at the time. More important rituals invite the attendance and even participation of different groups of people. Many professions or avocations have a deity associated with them; for example, Ométeotl is the patron deity of midwives, and Toci is the patron of doctors. True and faithful followers of the Path of the Sun make every effort to attend rituals honoring their patron deities.

Interestingly, attendance at such rituals is not required. No laws compel participation, and no consequences apart from possible social pressure result from absence. In fact, Aztlan law ensures that essential services are maintained even during major ceremonies and festivals. (For example, a certain number of doctors are legally compelled to remain on duty at the hospitals or on call even during a major festival revering Toci.)

NSA studies estimate that almost 40 percent of the Aztlan population regularly attends rituals associated with their professions or avocations. Another 28 percent of the population attends such festivals on an irregular basis. It is difficult to determine whether attendance at rituals actually reflects the level of religious belief within the culture. Do citizens attend festivals because they truly believe in the deities being honored? Or do they attend because it is "the thing to do"? It is impossible to distinguish between the two rationales based on external observation. Questioning of individuals is an inaccurate measure, as there is always societal incentive to claim belief in a state-sponsored religion.

PETITIONING THE DEITIES

In an interesting departure from the ancient Aztec religion, the Path of the Sun allows the "faithful" to petition their deities for boons and benefits through the intercession of the priests.

Traditionally, members of the Aztec clergy did not serve the people as counselors, psychologists, or analysts, as do the clergy of many other religions. In ancient times, the citizenry rarely, if ever, even met a senior priest. The closest they ever came to the Aztec holy men was watching one perform a ceremony atop the *teocalli*.

This distance does not exist in the modern-day state religion. Worshippers are allowed—even encouraged—to approach the priests and present petitions for favors, which the priests pass on to the deities at the next ritual. Major *teocalli* and the priests who serve them are also accessible via the Matrix; citizens can submit their petitions to the gods via standard e-mail. (NSA forensic psychologists point out the advantages that petitions offer to the state religion, and hence to the government. The tenor of petitions and trends among them gives the government a direct glimpse of the people's hearts and minds, uncluttered by the statistical artifacts often introduced by a formal opinion poll.)

>>>>>(So the government—and Aztechnology, of course—gets to eavesdrop on people's fragging prayers. Gaah.)<<<<<

—Job (17:14:51/5-8-56)

>>>>>(So all these temples are online, are they? Interesting. <Evil chuckle> How tough can the Matrix security be around a fragging church?)<<<<<

—Blood Leech (03:04:15/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Maybe a lot tougher than you expect, Leech. Take the Jesuit subsystem in the Vatican web—security's blacker than a corporator's heart. A typical *teocalli* system won't go quite that deep, but still probably packs enough wallop to give you pause. Expect a base level of Orange-4 or -5. SANs are typically loaded with Blaster ice, benchmarking at 7 or so (imagery is usually a traditional Aztec warrior armed with an obsidian-edged sword). Particularly sensitive nodes can benchmark at much higher.)<<<<<

—FastJack (02:48:52/5-11-56)

>>>>>(So do it the simple way. Want to take a look-see around? Just jander in there.)<<<<<

—Lost Boy (09:35:48/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Easier said than done, my chummer. Remember, these *teocalli* things ain't like standard churches. Worshippers don't go inside them, they just stand in front of them and watch the show. Only people allowed to go in are the clergy ... and the security personnel assigned to protect them. We're talking Aztechnology hard-men. Their jobs are largely ceremonial, so they don't wear armor and their most visible weapon is the big fragging obsidian-edged sword they carry. But bet your rosy heinie they've got some wizzer little gat close to hand: the Ingram SuperMach 100 seems to be the heater du jour. And since they're not packing armor, also bet your hoop they've got magical protection of some kind: armor spells, maybe even quickened so the spell's part of the hard-boy's aura.

Now let's talk magical penetration. Your typical "active" *teocalli*—a temple where drek's actually happening, not one of those pocket-sized roadside pyramids out in the desert—is protected by a magical barrier. I hear some places it's a hermetic circle, other places a medicine lodge. (I hear different things about the same *teocalli* depending on who's doing the telling, so I assume they switch between the two for some weird reason.) Whatever, the barrier is usually pretty mondo.

Also (if I get the details wrong, frag me; I ain't a mage, I'm just repeating what I hear from chummers), it's difficult to summon spirits or elementals near an "active" *teocalli*. (I know this slots off a lot of mystic-types who are used to whistling up a friendly hearth spirit and asking it some penetrating questions.) As I hear it, it's like there's a standing background count in the vicinity that makes it difficult to summon anything. If you manage to drag something across, it won't fully cooperate with you. It acts sullen and tries to misinterpret any orders you give it (to your detriment).)<<<<<

—Torii (09:45:05/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Torii old chummer, I heard the same thing about the medicine lodge/hermetic circle biz. Used to think the same thing you do—that for some reason the Azzies kept changing the "flavor" of the barrier they use. Then somebody suggested something I hadn't thought of before. Maybe the barrier doesn't change. Maybe it's always the same. Maybe it's something halfway between a hermetic circle and a medicine lodge (if that makes any sense), and people who look at it interpret it based on their preconceptions.)<<<<<

—Dagger (18:21:35/5-13-56)

:::::**[WORDSMYTH] I always considered the practice of petitioning to be a piece of sheer genius.**

:::::**[LADY OF THE COURT] We see your true stripes at last.**

SACRIFICES

Sacrifice lies at the heart of the Aztec religion, ancient and modern. Worshippers of the ancient Aztec gods often sacrificed items of personal or monetary value, and even their own blood, to the deities. Priests sacrificed humans, usually captives taken in battle, to supply the blood and hearts required to nourish the sun and keep it shining.

The importance and nature of sacrifice has changed somewhat in modern Aztlan. The most common form of symbolic sacrifice remains so-called autosacrifice. Faithful followers of the Path of the Sun frequently prick or pierce a part of their body—a finger or an ear, for example—to draw blood, which they often drip onto paper and burn in a fire. The fire carries the regenerative power of the blood to the "divine abodes" where the deities dwell. Entirely symbolic, this form of autosacrifice varies greatly in frequency, depending on the individual. Some worshippers "sacrifice" a drop of their blood every day as a matter of course. Others do so only when presenting a petition to the deities. Still others do so only on key religious festivals, such as the Feast of Tezcatlipoca on May 5. And some never do so at all.

>>>>>(Am I the only one who's getting a real bad feeling about this? We've got a whole fragging nation conducting blood sacrifices. Blood magic. That scares the drek out of me, people.)<<<<<

—Morningstar (18:35:56/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Keep yer shirt on, bud. It don't mean nothing, 'kay? Bunch of gullible slots sticking pins in their fingers? Who cares? You want to look at something real hinky, look at the ritual cannibalism the Catholic underground gets into. "This is my blood you drink, this is my body you eat ... " Turns my fragging stomach.)<<<<<

—Dogbreath (11:14:29/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Symbols have power, make no mistake about that. Some symbols carry with them consequences known to few of their practitioners. Autosacrifice is blood magic. Aztlan society is largely based on the widespread practice of blood magic. We should fear this.)<<<<<

—Skinwalker (15:40:29/5-8-56)

:::::**[HECATE] Fear this? Oh, please. I hope this was not what you considered so all-Holy important.**

:::::**[THE BIG 'D'] Pay attention, but remember.**

Some particularly devout individuals conduct other types of sacrifices, "donating" items of sentimental or concrete value to the deities. Items so sacrificed are usually burned. It is considered in very bad taste to conduct such sacrifices in public, or to draw any attention to them. Because no social benefits are gained, only the truly devout do such a thing. This form of personal sacrifice, again, central to the Aztec faith, has largely been replaced by the donation of currency or credit to the church hierarchy. It is considered right for a faithful follower of the Path of the Sun to "tithe" to the church hierarchy—that is, to donate 10 percent of his or her annual income. However, no laws require a tithe or any donation at all. The church has no way to punish or penalize a worshipper who does not tithe. The clergy is obliged to accept and pass on to the gods any

petition delivered to them, whether or not its originator tithes. The only overt incentive to donating to the church hierarchy is the belief that the "gods" know when a worshipper does not do so.

>>>>>(Not just the "gods"—the government and Aztechnology know too, neh?)<<<<<
—Markops (03:28:26/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Too true, cobber. So if you want to stay mates with the Powers That Be, pay your fragging tithes.)<<<<<
—The Crock (04:56:54/5-9-56)

Human sacrifices, of immense importance to the ancient Aztecs, are, of course, no longer performed.

>>>>>(Sez who? Wasn't it just last year that Aztlan tri-V showed that poor miserable bastard climbing the stairway up the outside of Tezcatlipoca's *teocalli* in downtown Tenochtitlán? And when he got to the top, didn't a priest lop his fragging head off with an obsidian-edged sword? Sounds like fragging human sacrifice to me ...)<<<<<
—Simmons (00:29:07/5-3-56)

>>>>>(Just because it was done on top of a temple with a ceremonial *macauitl* doesn't make it a sacrifice, Simmons—not as the Azzies define it. That poor slub was a convicted traitor to his country ... and hence to the prez ... and hence to the "Emperor." High treason is a capital offense in Aztlan, just like it is in most nations. Azzie law specifies that the death penalty for treason must be carried out in public atop a *teocalli*, with a *macauitl*. As the Azzies see it, that kind of death is no more a "human sacrifice" than if the traitor had been fried in an electric chair, shot against a wall, or injected with lethal chemicals.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (19:20:05/5-5-56)

>>>>>(And what do you think, Patty?)<<<<<
—Argent (19:20.51/5-5-56)

>>>>>(You know what I think, my friend.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (19:21:08/5-5-56)

>>>>>(I was in the square watching from the astral when the head came off. Chummers, something happened up there. I saw some kind of magical link form between the guy who lost his head and the priest who swung the sword. Not quite a spell, but some transfer of mana (and before you ask, no, I couldn't tell which way it went). Something happened, I just don't know what.)<<<<<
—Boojum (00:17:25/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Guess you didn't read the Azzie press releases, huh? The official propaganda explained that one. It's part of the tradition: as the sword swings, the victim is magically anesthetized. It's important symbolically to Aztlan traditions that a traitor lose his head, but they see no reason to be cruel about it. That's the official buzz, right from the horse's mouth: disseminated over the Matrix from the *teocalli* of Tezcatlipoca.)<<<<<
—Jervis (11:45:06/5-8-56)

>>>>>(And if you believe that, I've got some recreational property to sell you in Glow City.)<<<<<
—Firelance (23:59:29/5-9-56)

:::::[HECATE] A ritual execution. Again, I fail to see the reason for concern.

Secret Sacrifices

This section deals with a highly controversial issue: the possibility that the two initiatory groups discussed in a previous section are conducting (meta)human sacrifices without the knowledge of the people of Aztlan.

Recurring reports, as yet unsubstantiated but still disturbingly detailed and coherent, indicate that unusual activities have taken place and are still taking place within the larger temples in the Aztlan nation. UCAS (meta)human-intelligence case officers trained in observation techniques have reported incidents that seem to be cases of (meta)human sacrifice.

>>>>>(Human-intelligence case officers?)<<<<<
—Monteverde (10:31:06/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Bureaucratese for "spies.")<<<<<
—Jason (03:57:26/5-7-56)

No physical intelligence yet exists to document these incidents—no photographs, no trideo, no "hard" data downloaded to headware—but verbal reports backed by hypnotic analysis are all disturbingly and convincingly similar.

The incidents take place within the larger *teocalli*, or occasionally atop smaller ones, usually at night and frequently at the dark of the moon. The subject is brought to the place of sacrifice by priests wearing traditional regalia. All reports agree that the subject is remarkably calm and tractable throughout, as if drugged or magically controlled. Most reports of such events describe the subject as a human male; isolated reports, however, refer to female subjects and members of other metatypes.

The subject is held down by four priests, on his back across a stone altar. The presiding priest tears the subject's heart from his body using an obsidian knife, and immediately places the organ in either an offertory bowl or in the basin of a *Chac Mool* (a symbolic "messenger of the gods" carved from stone).

It is beyond the mandate of this brief to speculate as to the purpose and significance of these sacrifices. Even without physical intelligence to support the reports, it seems undeniable that they do in fact exist. While the vast majority have been reported—directly or indirectly—by civilian personnel, corroboration from professional intelligence personnel certainly supports these claims. It is recommended, then, that further assets be assigned to investigate and analyze this situation.

>>>>>(What chips are these chummers doing? I want some.)<<<<<
—Harkness (22:04:52/5-7-56)

>>>>>(No chip dream, Harkness. I haven't seen the official spook reports, but I've heard weird drek from enough people that I trust. There's something hinky going down.)<<<<<
—Doc (11:15:42/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, right. And I've seen Jetblack. (Oh, hey, did you know Elvis tried to assassinate Senator Schwarzenegger? It's true))<<<<<
—Boris (22:23:16/5-9-56)

>>>>>(I seen this drek myself, bonebrain. I'm not slotting or shooting anything and I seen it, okay? Not in Aztlan. In fragging Seattle. Up in the corp suites of the Aztechnology pyramid in downtown fragging Seattle. I saw some freak-outs in loincloths rip the fragging heart out of some bint they had stretched over a stone altar. They put her heart in a big stone bowl, and then they put the bowl in the middle of the boardroom table and burned the fragging heart. I'm not drekking you. It happened.)<<<<<
—Dark Elf (00:21:21/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Ah. I see. Hey, Dark, was this before or after you stopped taking your medication, huh, chummer?)<<<<<
—Strauss (16:02:18/5-10-56)

BELIEF IN DEMONS

An interesting aspect of the Aztlan state religion is an apparent belief in demons—specifically, in creatures known as *tzitzimine*, or "demons of twilight." To understand the significance of these demons, one must know a little more about the Aztec calendar.

>>>>>(Oh, right. The Long Count and the Sixth World, honto?)<<<<<
—Jasmine (12:18:14/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Not quite. Scan on, Jas. This whole Long Count drek doesn't mean squat. It doesn't match anything the Aztecs believed. Probably came from some flaky datatab screamsheet, and because it was a slow news day the rest of the media latched on to it.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (19:04:32/5-10-56)

According to traditional Aztec belief, the sun was the most important element in the environment because it brought life and light to the earth below. Therefore, the major deities often fought to determine which one of them would become the sun. Whenever a new deity defeated and replaced the current sun, the "world" supposedly ended in a great cataclysm and a new age began. Certain historians interpret Aztec writings as claiming the following eons or ages have already passed:

- The **Sun of the Jaguar**: 955 BCE to 279 BCE. This eon ended when all the people of the earth were slain and eaten by jaguars.
- The **Sun of the Wind**: 270 BCE to 397 CE. This eon ended when a hurricane swept the earth and changed all humans into monkeys.
- The **Sun of the Rain**: 397 CE to 709 CE. This eon ended when the earth was scoured by fire and all humans became turkeys.

·The **Sun of the Water**: 709 CE to 761 CE. This eon ended when the sky poured with water, drowning all life except for humans, who turned into fish.

·The **Sun of Motion**: 761 CE to ?

The Aztec religion does not predict when the current Fifth Sun (the "Fifth World") will end. The length of previous eons ranges from 676 years to 52 years. Myths claim that the Fifth Sun will end with a cataclysmic earthquake, after which the *tzitzimine* will emerge into the world and devour anyone who managed to survive. According to the tenets of Aztec religious faith, the fact that this has not happened indicates that the Aztecs and the people of modern Aztlan have served the deities well by being faithful to their traditions.

>>>>>(Huh? Isn't this whole Sixth World feldercarb based on Aztec religion? So where the frag does December 14, 2011, come from, huh?)<<<<<

—Bingo (20:58:43/5-7-56)

>>>>>(That's a Mayan belief, Bingo. Mayan, not Aztec. Got it, Patty? Mayan, not Aztec. Aztlan traditions don't talk about the present time as the Sixth World. To them, we're still living in the Fifth Sun. The Sixth Sun won't start until after the *tzitzimine* have come out and eaten our fragging brains. So scan on.)<<<<<

—Holly (03:21:45/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Oops. Mea culpa, you're right of course. <hanging head in shame>)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (18:57:46/5-12-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Tzitzimine? This subject is only briefly touched on in the material I have read. It seemed to have little significance beyond the the usual for such things. Is the calendar not common knowledge?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] No. I myself am only peripherally aware of it. But I can tell you that the earlier transitions in the calendar have no basis in truth. The ages changed based on the whim of priests, not on fact.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Fact is not what concerns me here.

The significance of this ancient legend is that certain apocalyptic "cults" within Aztlan's religious community believe that the *tzitzimine* are about to emerge. These groups claim that various omens indicating the imminent end of the Fifth Sun have already occurred, though they cannot explain what those omens are. They say (meta)humans can do nothing except prepare for the coming plague. An interesting variation of this apocalyptic belief is the hint that some groups actually welcome the imminent appearance of the *tzitzimine* and are working to achieve circumstances that will hasten their arrival.

>>>>>(I wondered if anyone knew about this. As I understand it, this one freako cult down Oaxaca way fragging worships these *tzitzimine*—they believe when the "demons of twilight" come out from wherever they're lurking, they'll reward whoever's worked to let them come out earlier than they would have otherwise. Nothing unique so far, huh? Every religion seems to have its apocalyptic or millennial cults.

The twisted thing—if all this talk about (meta)human sacrifices in the temples is right—these freako cultists are using exactly the same rituals as everyone else to speed up the end of the eon and the appearance of the demons. The *tzitzimine* worshippers are ripping the hearts out of innocent slubs, too. That's the way I hear it, at least.

Creepy, huh? It's like hearing that the Roman Catholic Church and the International Church of Satan are performing exactly the same Mass, but with opposite intentions.)<<<<<

—Margeson (18:46:32/5-15-56)

>>>>>(Why do you assume the cultists and the priests have opposite intentions ... ?)<<<<<

—Zorba (00:42:43/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Slot off, Zorba, what the frag do you know about it anyway?

The "twilight demon" cult isn't limited to Oaxaca, though it probably started there. These days, there's a chapter (if I can use that word ... ?) in Tenochtitlán itself. The High Priest, this born loser who calls himself Sol ("Sun"), has even gotten on some public-access trid shows to claim the *tzitzimine* are coming right fragging now. How does he know? Because one of the strongest omens has occurred: the emergence of the insect spirits. The insect spirits are the harbingers of the *tzitzimine*.

Yeah, right, pull the other one. I'd have considered that a lot more convincing—freaky, even—if he'd predicted that "omen" before anyone knew squat about insect spirits. Back in 2049, maybe. At the moment? Post hoc miracles don't yank my crank, thanks all the same.)<<<<<

—Bullus (01:42:46/5-17-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] An interesting connection, but one that could be viewed simply as an omen.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Of course it could, but the "omen" has some basis in fact. One is a harbinger of the other.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] The time is far from right.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] You said that not too long ago, but I have seen otherwise.

:::::[HECATE] So you say.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] So you have seen!

>>>>>(You heard the latest? "Sol" got himself arrested couple days back. "For what?" I hear you ask. For depositing an "offering" on the desk of the personal secretary of Juan

Atzcapotzalco, Prez and CEO of Aztechnology Corporation, to be delivered to Juan "as soon as would be convenient." The offering was a fragging elf's heart! Fresh, warm, and squishy, maybe 40 minutes out of the elf's chest cavity. Yum! Needless to say, "Sol" is up on charges for second-degree murder and the cops are combing the city's dumpsters, alleys, and sewers for an elf minus a heart. God, I love Tenochtitlán ... !)<<<<<

—Southern Cross (18:59:09/5-24-56)

>>>>>(??? How the frag did he manage to smuggle a dripping heart into the guts of the Aztechnology building, right outside Atzcapotzalco's office, huh? Must be sec-guards' heads rolling in the corridors. What if the "offering" had been a couple of kilos of C-12? Boom.

And why the frag did he figure Atzcapotzalco would want an "offering" like that ... ?)<<<<<

—Carpenter (21:19:02/5-24-56)

>>>>>(Loser.)<<<<<

—Judy Moon (15:01:25/5-25-56)

>>>>>(Precisely. To think that Atzcapotzalco should be receiving the blood offering! Foolishness.)<<<<<

—Centli (09:22:05/5-26-56)

:::::[HECATE] Was this a personal message, or was there some deeper meaning?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Nearly as big a message as they come, but not for Atzcapotzalco ...

The various "twilight demons" cults are interesting subfacets of Aztlan society. With time or the right support, they may become major factors.

AZTLAN AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Starting at the turn of the century, restrictions on the operations of the Roman Catholic Church within Mexico (later Aztlan) became more stringent. The government revoked the church's tax-free status in 2027, and for the next four consecutive years subjected the church's financial records to a detailed audit. Charges of tax evasion and outright fraud were leveled against various important church figures in Aztlan, including the Most Reverend Jésus de la Torrez, Tenochtitlán's archbishop. (Apparently more symbolic than substantive, the charges were quietly dropped before the case came to trial.) In 2041, an Executive Order from the president's office officially rescinded the Roman Catholic Church's right to function within the nation of Aztlan.

>>>>>(That's a tad simplified. Actually, that Executive Order declared the Roman Catholic Church a revolutionary organization, dedicated to the overthrow of the existing political and social order. The church didn't just have its charter lifted. It was actively suppressed.)<<<<<

—Domingo (10:35:08/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Brutally suppressed. Profession of belief in Roman Catholic teachings, attendance at Catholic church services, distribution of Catholic "propaganda" (including missals and the Holy Bible) sheltering and succoring "fugitives" such as Jesuits or Catholic priests, and even entering a Catholic church all became illega-

The Holy Church, of course, did not to abdicate its responsibility to the souls of the faithful. Instead, it went underground. For the first months after the issuance of the Executive Order, local priests still conducted services in the churches at night and in secret. Then security forces began breaking up these services, beating and arresting the priests who conducted them and the faithful who attended. They drove the Holy Church ever deeper underground.)<<<<<

—Matador (21:56:21/5-10-56)

Since 2041, the church has functioned as an underground organization. The purpose of the church in Aztlan, according to Vatican City spokespeople, is to serve the spiritual needs of the Aztlan people. The church has no quarrel with the Aztlan government or with Aztechnology Corporation, and absolutely no desire to stir up antigovernment feeling or activity within the nation.

The truth is quite different, however. This office has good reason to believe that various subgroups within the underground church are serving as nuclei for antigovernment, subversive activities. Catholic priests and their followers are plotting and preaching subversion, though generally in a geographically limited manner. For example, a "hotbed" of subversive activity is based around an underground "church" in Portobelo, Panama State, northeast of the Canal Zone. The activities of this cabal are limited to the Portobelo region, not even reaching as far as the city of Colón.

>>>>>(For the moment, maybe. The buzz I hear is that the pan-corp forces in the Canal Zone are taking this "church cabal" threat quite seriously indeed, thank you very much.)<<<<<

—Alchemy (22:15:42/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Hey, why not? The Canal Zone represents one wizzer of a lever—a great way of putting Aztlan and the pan-corp contingent at odds again. I figure we'll see a serious hotting up of activity around the Canal Zone in the near future. Subversives trying to stir things up and Azzie assets trying to squelch those subversive elements before they can do anything nasty.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (12:00:01/5-11-56)

It is an open secret that the Catholic Church covertly supports the PAN opposition party. For reasons of its own, the Aztlan government seems unwilling to suppress PAN, though the government is trying to separate PAN from its church backers.

At the current time, this office estimates that 4 percent of Aztlan's population consider themselves Catholic and attend covert Catholic services at least once a year. However, if the definition of "Catholic" extends to those who sympathize with the church's teachings, philosophies and activities in Aztlan, the proportion of "Catholics" in the population approaches 50 percent. Pro-Catholic sentiment is a highly significant factor in Aztlan society that all analyses must take into account.

>>>>>(Fifty percent? If that's true, why don't these "underground Catholics" do something, huh?)<<<<<

—Dobu (15:11:22/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Chummer, it's a frag of a long way from admitting, "yeah, I pray ... but don't tell anyone!" to hanging your hoop out in the wind by acting against the government. I'd bet only a handful of that 4 percent are actually going to take any risks to promote their beliefs.)<<<<<

—Webster (10.09:15/5-10-56)

>>>>>(It doesn't take many people to stir up mondo drek if they do it right. (You know that, Webster, better than most of us.) And some of these slags look like they're getting ready to do it right. Background buzz on the Bourse in Geneva says some Catholic faction in Aztlan is looking to buy weapons. Not assault rifles and SMGs, either—I'm talking exotics. Antitank guided missiles, mortars with smart rounds ... I hear they're even shopping for vehicle-mounted assault lasers.)<<<<<

—Nightfire (12:52:37/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Now isn't that a fresh image? Priests delivering Extreme Unction with a Firelance laser ...)<<<<<

—JohnnyZ (21:25:05/5-11-56)

>>>>>(I don't believe the church is getting behind heavy-duty rebellion, chummers. Maybe it's a bunch of hotheads who claim to be Catholics, huh?)<<<<<

—Rimshot (00:05:25/5-12-56)

THE NEW SOCIETY OF JESUS

An interesting development in Aztlan revolves around rumors concerning the so-called New Jesuits, the New Society of Jesus. As of this writing, this office has received no conclusive evidence proving the existence of the New Jesuits. Recurring rumors similar in many important regards abound, however, which are discussed in this brief.

The New Jesuits are purportedly not an organization specific to Aztlan. Like the original Society of Jesus, the New Jesuits are believed to be headquartered in Vatican City. No name has been proposed as the hypothetical Commander-General of the Society, though it would seem logical for that individual to be a member of the papal Curia. If the New Jesuits exist, their activities outside Vatican City are either limited to Aztlan or successfully concealed.

Rumors describe the New Jesuits as (meta)human-intelligence agents organized like a paramilitary group. The New Jesuits are said to include deckers, military-trained personnel, and undercover agents. Rumor also claims that a significant proportion of New Jesuits have undergone cybernetic modification to some degree.

The goals of the New Jesuits in Aztlan remain unknown. Unsubstantiated rumors propose that the order is at the core of various nominally Catholic, anti-government factions, including at least one active terrorist group. Other rumors claim that the Jesuits' sole purpose is to protect the church and its congregation from further oppression. Still others suggest that the New Jesuits have ties to the rebels in the Yucatán. Further information will be presented as it is discovered and confirmed.

>>>>>(Okay, chummers, give. What's the real deal?)<<<<<

—Duck&Cover (10:39:48/5-7-56)

>>>>>(The real deal is that the New Jesuits exist, though I haven't met any (lucky me, I figure). They're tied into all the things the report just said: protecting the church, jacking off the Aztlan government when and if, and liaising with the rebels.)<<<<<

—Argent (18:11:13/5-7-56)

>>>>>(I've met one—chromed and polished like a knife blade he was, too. Polite and well spoken. An urbane killer who could explain to you with rigorous logic just why he had to gut you. He didn't tell me the full-meal deal, but he hinted at a couple of interesting things.

All those goals you just read in the report? Yeah, the New Jesuits are involved in them, but as a sideline. The real reason they're in the country, hanging their hoops out in the wind, is to investigate the Aztlan government and Aztechnology. They want answers to a couple of pressing questions that the Holy Father in the Vatican has about the situation. (No, I don't know the precise nature of those questions. Sorry.) Anything else they can do to help the circumstances of loyal Catholics along the way ... wizzer, as long as it doesn't compromise their intelligence gathering.

Here's another weird little gem the New Jesuit let slip. He and his comrades are brilliant scholars of theoretical magic. They could probably teach a fragging graduate course in the subject at MIT&M. But not one of them is a mage or a shaman. Not one man-jack of them. I asked him why; he told me it would open them to unacceptable risks, considering their mission. Make of that what you will.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (17:04:35/5-9-56)

>>>>>(What I'll make of it is big, stinking piles in the sewers where it belongs. In other words, drek, big-time.)<<<<<

—Honker (11:12:31/5-10-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] This decription of the Jesuits sounds like it comes from bad trid-vid.

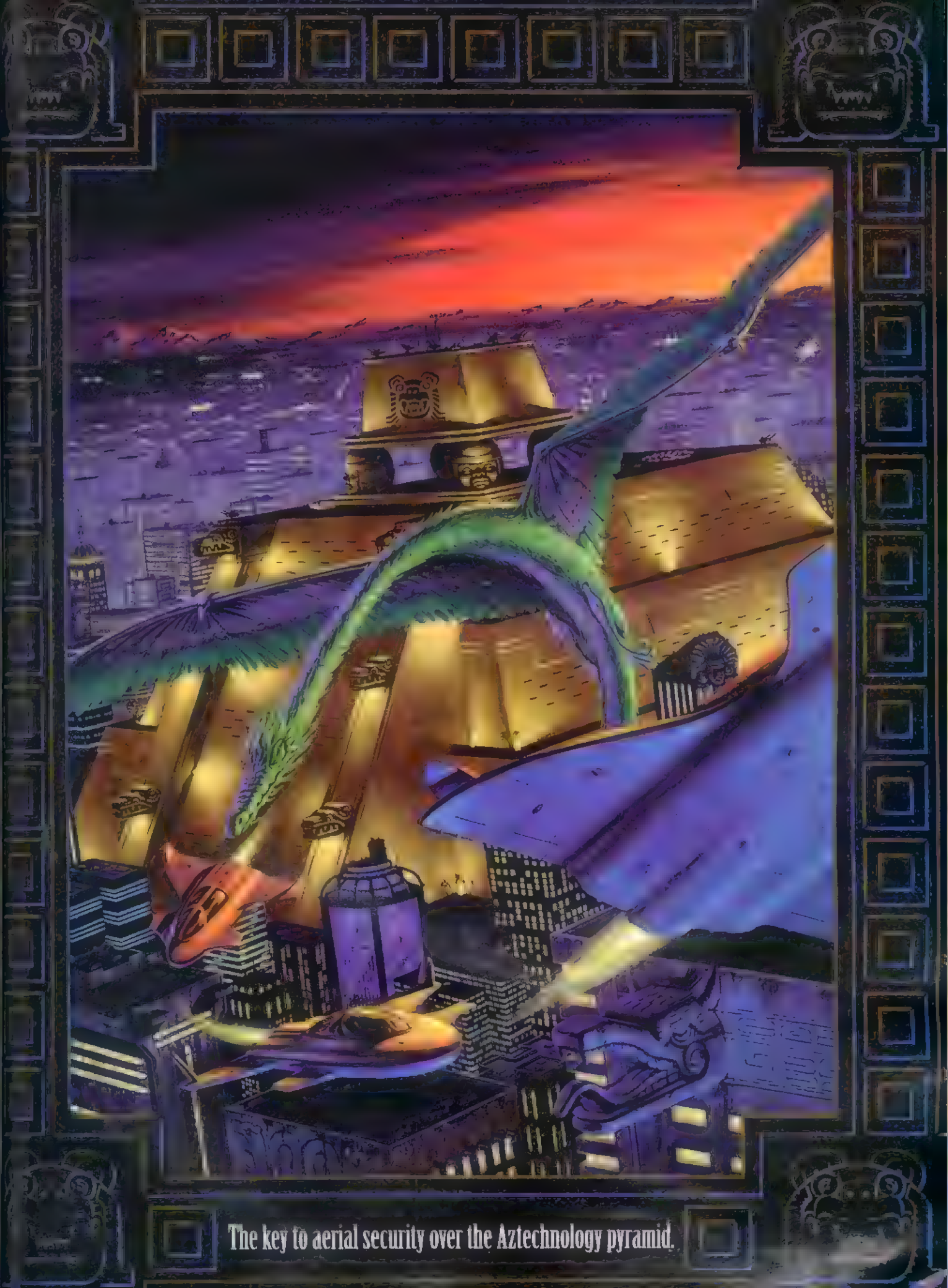
:::::[HECATE] Based on what was said earlier, it would seem you know better ... ?

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Yes, I know better. I'll leave you to find out the details for yourselves. They are not just a Catholic SWAT team. If that were so, there would be nothing to concern ourselves with.

:::::[HECATE] So there is more?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] The Lady does not speak ... even to tell us that many are magically active, which is mundane knowledge. <pun intended> Brightlight's absence is again unfortunate. It would be most interesting to know what he thinks about them. <chuckle>

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] We might indeed find it interesting if he were party to their activities here but I doubt this is so. Shall we proceed?

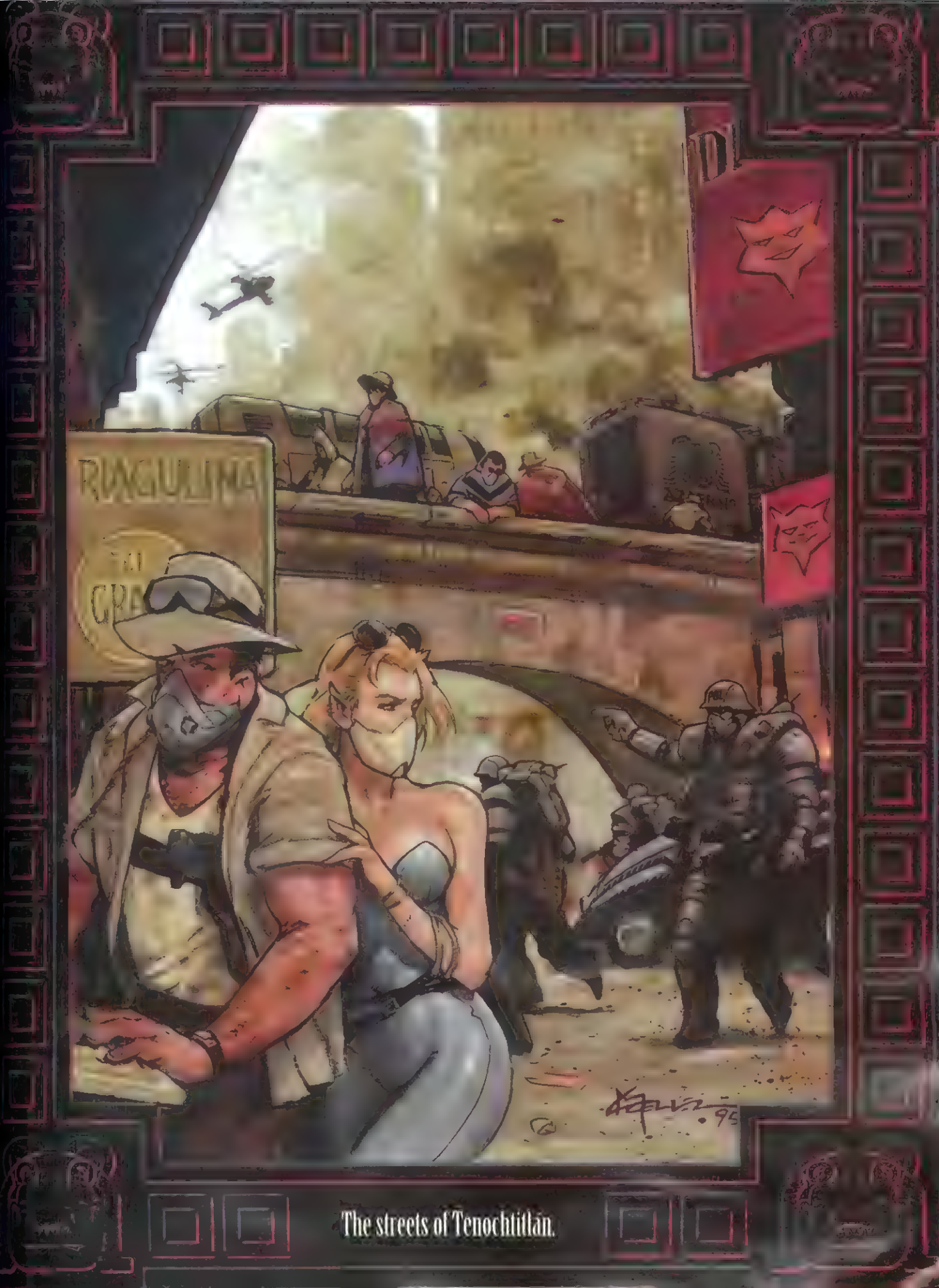


The key to aerial security over the Aztechnology pyramid.

Aztlan soldiers defend against rebel guerrillas in the Yucatán.

Thomas Roxborough circa 2055.

An *Otontin* warrior prepares to cast a spell using blood magic.



The streets of Tenochtitlán.

A priest of Xiutecutli summons a blood spirit.

A shaman of Quetzalqóatl, the plumed serpent

An naive mage has an unfortunate encounter with a foveae.

AZTLAN MAGIC

>>>>>(I don't know where this screed came from. It was part of Espectro's original file, but didn't offer a clue as to its origin. Who knows—maybe this stuff is Espectro's personal contribution.

By the by, this came in Spanish—Castilian Spanish, not Aztlaner Spanish. In other words, the dialect they speak in España We're back to WORD/word for the translation. The original text was casual, colloquial, almost flippant in tone. The WORD/word translation package tried to stick to that ... but as you'll notice, it blows out from time to time. (Kind of reassuring to know that software hasn't quite got the hang of chili-talking ...)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:29:15/5-1-56)

Lots of people say the laws of magic don't change, no matter where you go in the world. That's nonsense. Anyone who says that obviously hasn't traveled. A single visit to New Zealand, Haiti or Bhutan can tell you differently. Certainly, many things stay the same ... but real differences exist. This is certainly true in Aztlan. The Aztlan nation has different totems and even entirely different styles of magic.

AZTLAN TOTEMS

Some Aztlan shamans follow the songs of familiar totems: Eagle, Snake, Wolf, Coyote, Bear, Dog, Raven, Cat, and Rat. Along the coasts, some shamans follow the ways of Shark, though Shark shamans aren't particularly common.

>>>>>(Of the "standard" totemic animals, Eagle and Snake are "local favorites." Why? Look at the national seal and coat-of-arms of Aztlan. It's pretty much the same as it used to be when the place was called Mexico: an eagle sitting on a cactus, eating a snake.)<<<<<

—NiteSpawn (03:17:50/5-8-56)

Aztlan also has a whole crop of local totems that don't turn up anywhere else in the world. The major ones are Plumed Serpent (Quetzalcóatl), Jaguar, Puma, and Iguana. Iguana, Puma, and Jaguar are wilderness totems; Quetzalcóatl can be wilderness or urban.

>>>>>(Oh, man ... made the mistake of riding in a fragging minibus with an Iguana shaman. We had to keep pulling over every half hour so he could bail out and look at the fragging sky.)<<<<<

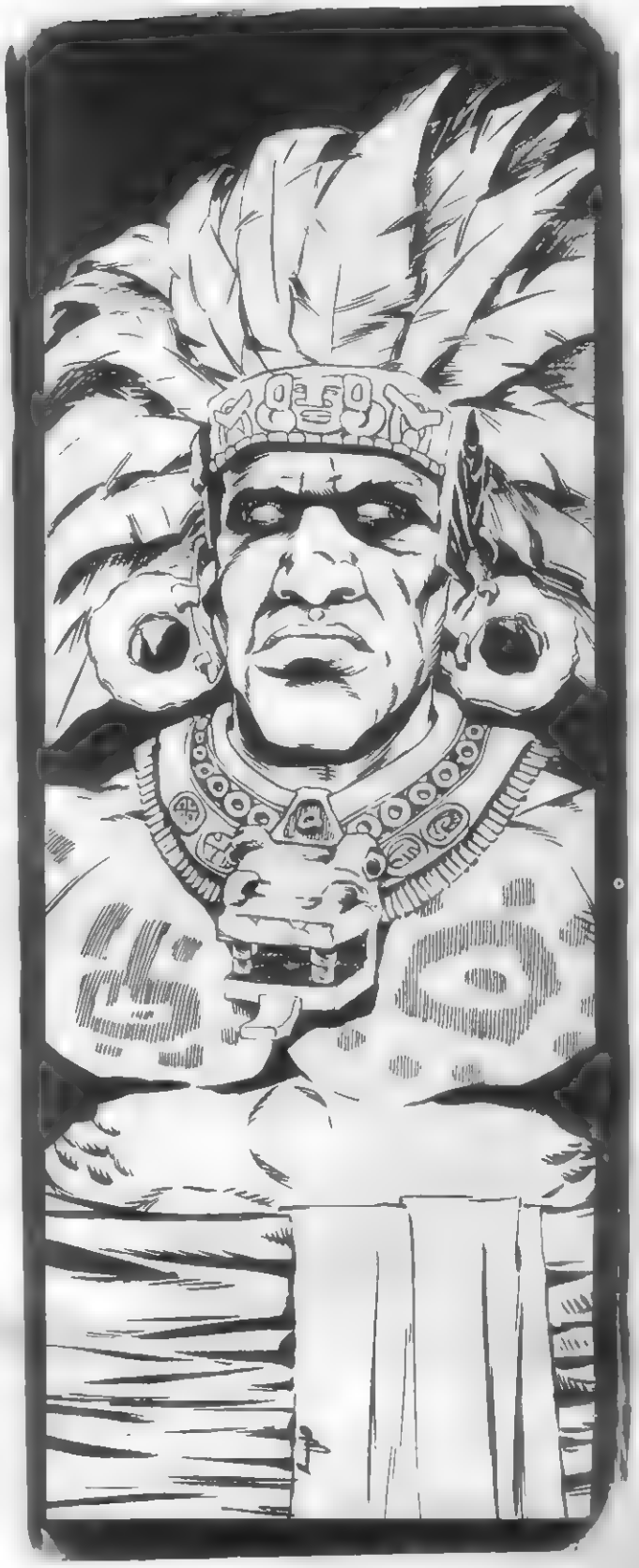
—Daedalus (17:52:09/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Chummer, I dossed down with one of them guys on a run. Middle of the fragging night he went fragging ballistic because the zipper on his fragging sleeping bag got fragging stuck !)<<<<<

—Torque Wrench (12:15:58/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Anybody out there worked with a Jag shaman? Does the phrase "jack of all trades and master of none" ring bells?)<<<<<

—Wendy (17:00:31/5-12-56)



>>>>>(I guess. This one guy I ran with, he seemed to be a fragging genius at everything—including drek we never thought he could handle. We came to depend on that. Of course, the Mexican frag-up came when he couldn't do something we expected him to handle ... and he didn't fragging tell us he couldn't do it until it was too late. Hose city.)<<<<<

—Master Blaster (09:58:59/5-20-56)

>>>>>(You'd think Quetzalcóatl would be the totem of choice for higher-ups in the Azzie government and Aztechnology, huh? Wrongo, amigos. Almost nobody in the "establishment" listens to the song of Quetzalcóatl, not even the priests who serve at the temple dedicated to the deity of the same name. Frakky, huh?)<<<<<

—Talbot (00:38:57/5-21-56)

>>>>>(Not really. Quetzalcóatl is the guardian and champion of the Aztlan nation. That description fits all too few members of the Aztlan "establishment," I fear.)<<<<<

—Sangre (16:28:06/5-22-56)

:::::**[HECATE] Nothing unexpected here.**

:::::**[THE BIG 'D'] How confident you seem against what we are learning here.**

BLOOD MAGIC

Blood magic is the most controversial part of Aztlaner magic. Wherever you go in the world, you hear rumors calling it a "school" or "style" of magic practiced only in Aztlan. Is this "characteristic Aztlan magic" truly a distinct form or school or class of magic—a type of metamagic, for example? Or has magical research in Aztlan simply developed spells with novel effects that make them seem different from those familiar to mages elsewhere in the world?

To answer this question, we must first look at what is known (unfortunately, not much). We know, for example, that some Aztlaner magicians can cast familiar spells at surprisingly high force levels without seeming to suffer from drain.

>>>>>(Seen this one Azzie toss a mondo hellblast at a Force that should have sprayed blood out his eye sockets. Didn't seem to faze him worth squat; he shrugged off that drain like it didn't exist.)<<<<<

—Lionheart (00:39:07/5-10-56)

>>>>>(This spellworm—was he alone?)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (17:29:35/5-10-56)

>>>>>(You betcha.)<<<<<

—Lionheart (23:29:06/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Then you're a lying frag. Scan on.)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (15:33.27/5-11-56)

:::::**[WORDSMYTH] What does that—**

:::::**[THE BIG 'D'] Quiet.**

:::::**[THE LAUGHING MAN] !!!**

It seems Aztlaner mystics can only pull this trick off if a "donor"—or perhaps "surrogate" is a better word—is present when they cast the spell. Somehow, the drain transfers to the surrogate. The caster doesn't feel it at all. In every known case, the transferred drain does not seem to cause merely mental damage. Instead of stunning or disorienting the surrogate, the drain inflicts physical harm. Observers have reported bleeding wounds spontaneously opening up on the body of the surrogate, indicating specific and localized physical damage. These wounds give this magical practice the common name of "blood magic."

>>>>>(Close, but no cigar. Yes, the spellworms need a surrogate to dodge the drain. Yes, those surrogates often end up bloodied or even dead. But the wounds on the surrogate don't open spontaneously. They appear because the spellcaster puts them there.

Here's how I scan it, boys and girls. (But first a disclaimer. I don't know all the highfalutin' terminology for this magic drek, like "metamagic" and all that glarb. I'm just a street monster whose major experience with spells is dodging them. So I'm talking about what I've seen while trying to keep myself from becoming a worm farm.)

When the Azzie magician casts a spell, he draws blood from the surrogate. I'm not talking about a prick on the finger here, I'm talking about a fragging slash with a very sharp knife. The slot who tried to toast me laid the face of his "surrogate" open to the bone with his first spell, and touched the blood that poured out as he flung the juju. (That ticked me off pretty harshly, seeing as the "surrogate" was Aurora, a member of my team ...) I didn't have the courtesy to collapse in a flaming heap like he'd hoped, so he tried it again

This time I guess he figured he needed more jam—and more blood—because he ripped Aurora's throat open from ear to ear. It gave him what he needed, because that spell punched right through my defenses—motherfragging heavy defensive juju the team hermetic laid on me before the op—and laid me out pretty good. Thought I was dying.

So did the spellworm. He dropped what was left of poor Aurora and he came over toward me to taunt me as I faded away. He also dropped his antibullet barrier ... and Snake-eye, our long rifle, took him down with a clean center-head from a klick out.

And that's the name of that tune.)<<<<<

—Hangfire (20:51:11/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Great steaming loads of buildrek! What the frag you been slotting, Hangfire? Or are you a month late for fragging April Fool's Day, huh?)<<<<<

—Tomtom (17:49:07/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Hangfire's right. (Sorry about Aurora, Fire. Didn't know that was how she went out. Tough stories.) I saw something just like that. An Azzie shaman hacked open the arm of the sec-guard beside him (surprised the frag out of the sec-guard!) and then cast a juicer of a spell without even cracking a sweat. The sec-guard looked like pure pluperfect hell (before I shot him).)<<<<<
—Sidewinder (02:27:46/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Magic doesn't work that way!)<<<<<
—Phantom (04:28:13/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Not the way you sling it, maybe ...)<<<<<
—WizKid (11:05:56/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Explain this, then, since we're trading Azzie mage stories. The stitch I saw didn't cut a surrogate because she didn't have one; she cut herself. Laid her own forearm open with a fragging obsidian knife, slashed herself real good. And then she cacked four of my chummers with a powerball that boiled their brains. What the frag was that about?)<<<<<
—Akula (18:04:52/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Huh. Never heard of that before. Powering the spell with her own blood, maybe? Using that power to diminish drain? Theoretically possible, I suppose.)<<<<<
—Webster (00:42:01/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Okay, children. I've deleted about 3 megapulses of "is-not-are-too" squabbling that offered precisely zero information content. Can we get back to some kind of substantive debate, please?)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (21:28:06/5-16-56)

>>>>>((Sorry, Cap, we'll be good. Promise.) Here's what I shake out of the argument. Some Azzie spellworms—stress "some"—have apparently learned to power spells with the life energy (New-Agey newspeak, I know, but I don't know how else to say it) in blood. They'd rather draw that blood from someone else, but sometimes they'll draw it from themselves. This life energy lets them obviate some of the drain that would otherwise harsh them out. I think I can buy that. (I didn't say I understood it, but there's more things in heaven and earth, and so on.)

My big question is whether the blood is actually important, or whether it's a symbol for life. (So much of magic is symbolic.) What I'm getting at is, would it be possible for a mage to draw the life energy directly from a surrogate without cutting the flesh, like a vampire does? Just wondering.)<<<<<
—Webster (09:39:05/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Why the frag would you want to cut yourself? You're taking damage one way or the other. If you eat the drain, it's mental; if you slice your hide, it's physical. Where's the percentage?)<<<<<
—Arlington (10:05:28/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Here's my guesses. First, you might want to take physical damage rather than fatigue because you can heal physical damage magically. You can't do that to fatigue, neh? (If I was playing this game, I'd load myself up with one-shot fetishes and telesma just groaning with treat or heal spells.)

Second, maybe there's a "leveraging" effect here. Maybe by lightly wounding myself, I can dodge a drain hit that would seriously fatigue me or even knock me out. If that's the case, it becomes a cost-benefit analysis, neh? Or maybe I'm just up my hoop.)<<<<<

—Webster (08:56:35/5-18-56)

>>>>>(Chummers, this whole discussion is too twisted to take seriously. If this is possible, how come nobody else has ever done it anywhere else in the world? Sure, breakthroughs happen in research ... but more often than not, two or three researchers make the same breakthrough at almost the same time. How come this one's limited to Aztlan? I don't buy it, friends.)<<<<<

—Jaco (19:22.52/5-18-56)

>>>>>(Couple of questions there, Jaco. First question, how come nobody else does it? Maybe because it's a kind of metamagic. You need to be a high-grade initiate to toss this kind of jam.

Second question: what if it didn't come from research? Maybe somebody taught the Azzie spellworms how this drek works.)<<<<<

—Chester (21:39:09/5-18-56)

>>>>>(Divine inspiration, maybe? Direct revelations from Quetzal-fragging-cóatl? Cut me loose.)<<<<<

—Hyperfine (00:38:23/5-19-56)

>>>>>(I've heard this kind of metamagic referred to as the "Path of the Blood.")<<<<<

—Lute (10:00:40/5-22-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Ha!—Laughing Man, is this what you told us you witnessed on your journey through the netherworlds involving the Bridge?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I did not witness it, but others did. They visited a Place, a post-apocalyptic world that may have been symbolic of our own, where blood magic much like this was practiced.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Could one of your surrogates from the journey have figured it out?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] No. We've heard rumors of this for some time, but we've never seen any proof. I find it hard to believe that if such acts are common, we would not have known of them.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] But you did know of them. You'd at least heard of them, if not seen them. Perhaps they were deliberately kept concealed from you?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Why?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Because Amazonia obviously has the backing of ancient powers. Their techniques might have been recognized ...

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] This is dangerous. It implies an understanding of blood rites deeper than I'd suspected.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] And it means there could be things going on in the temples that are far more dangerous than we'd feared ...

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Yes.

Blood Spirits

Along with the rumors of blood magic come hints that certain Aztlaner shamans can conjure and command so-called blood spirits. Apparently only shamans can conjure and control these unusual beings; they seem unconstrained by domains, though in other ways they act like nature spirits, and they can be bound as ally spirits.

>>>>>(Uurgh, you're farcing. An Azzie shaman with a blood spirit as an ally? Makes me want to yarf.)<<<<<

—Oolong (10:04:12/5-7-56)

Either no one knows or no one is telling where these spirits come from or how they are summoned. Because they tend to turn up near *teocalli*, it's possible that Aztlan "sacred ground" might act as a kind of pseudodomain for them as far as conjuring is concerned.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] No, this can't be! Such techniques are forbidden!

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Forbidden to whom?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Forbidden by anyone with any sense. This is dangerous.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Hecate, if I may call you that ... You are being awfully quiet.

>>>>>(You want to know how they're conjured? I'll tell you, chummers. (Get a grip on your breakfast, Oolong ...)

They're summoned from ritual sacrifices, boys and girls. The shaman cacks a sacrifice and then tries to whistle up a blood spirit from the corpse. It doesn't have to be a (meta)human who buys it over the altar, but as I understand it the big-juju spirits come only from the sacrifice of sentients. In other words, if the shaman's satisfied with a little pecker of a spirit—Force 1 or 2,

BSXS 95

maybe—she can tear the heart out of a dog or a peccary or something. If she wants a mondo spirit, watch out. (The way I hear it, if the sacrifice is magically adept, the summoning goes even better.))<<<<<

—Lincoln (23:39:02/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Oh man, that's twisted.)<<<<<

—Markops (10:53:46/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Linc's right on the beam, amigos. Little while back I was spending some quality time with a big spender who happened to be an Aztechnology shaman. He got a little loose in the lips—might have had something to do with the drugs I slipped into his tequila—and told me more than he probably should have.

First off, don't worry about Azzie shamans vivisecting cats in back alleys and sending blood spirits after you. The ritual is complicated and has to take place in the right spot: in a *teocalli*, with the sacrifice getting ripped up on the stone altar. (I think there must be more *teocalli* around than the ones you see on the maps. As I understand it, the pyramid shape of the building is crucial, but the altar can be anywhere in the building. So next time you get outside, take a quick boo at the Aztechnology building—nice pyramid shape, isn't it?—and see if you can figure what I'm driving at.)

My beau also told me that the significance of the sacrifice depends on three things: the size of the thing that gets cacked, the amount of magical juice in it, and its intelligence. So at the bottom end of the scale you've got little, drek-dumb, non magical yarf like rats. Further up you've got Awakened critters. Then there's mundane humans and metatypes, then mages or shamans. (For some reason, this slag was particularly enamored with elves ...)

And at the top of the scale ... ? Dragons, chummers. That's what he told me. He didn't say if anyone had actually tried it, but he was pretty fragging adamant that you'd be able to pull one honking blood spirit out of a sacrificed dragon.)<<<<<

—Spook (09:40:14/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Drek. Ugly thought. Can these things go free ... ?)<<<<<

—Tillie (11:56:57/5-18-56)

:::::**[WORDSMYTH] Dragon, can you speak to this??**

:::::**[THE BIG 'D'] I know of no losses of any of my kind to this perversion. I believe, however, that it has been attempted with lesser forms. With what success, I do not know.**

:::::**[JUNGLE CAT] Such corruption was possible before ... but now? So soon?**

:::::**[THE LAUGHING MAN] Remember, they need a certain environment to be summoned, but they do not need it to endure.**

FOVEAE

Even less is known about another strange twist in Aztlan's "magical environment": the presence of foveae, or "blind spots," in the mana flow in Aztlan territory. According to persistent rumor, mana does not exist in certain places. Magic won't work; shamans and mages can't cast spells; fetishes, focuses, telesma and enchanted weapons become inert. Conjured spirits and elementals refuse to enter a fovea; if ordered to do so, they will resist (and probably destroy themselves in the process).

Nonsentient Awakened creatures seem to instinctively sense foveae and avoid them. (Unlike spirits, however, Awakened creatures can be driven into a fovea by direct threat to their life, such as fire.) Sentient Awakened creatures can sometimes sense the proximity of a fovea. Needless to say, Awakened creatures' paranatural abilities do not function within a "blind spot."

>>>>>(A shapechanger bud of mine said foveae feel like nothing. Like a big hole torn in the fabric of reality. Gave him a queasy feeling, he said. Said he'd go a long way to avoid having to step into one.)<<<<<
—Starburst (09:16:59/5-9-56)

More disturbingly, rumors claim that mages and shamans who try to take a trip into the astral inside a fovea sometimes go mad or even die as a result of the experience. This reaction sounds similar to the bad response mystics suffer who try to use magic in space, or while riding a semiballistic transport that carries them beyond earth's atmosphere.

>>>>>(Sometimes they go mad. Sometimes they die. Sometimes what happens to them is worse than that.)<<<<<
—Sharpe (15:56:22/5-8-56)

>>>>>(You know what this document says? It implies that there's holes in the fragging atmosphere in Aztlan. How the frag can that happen? I didn't think that was possible.)<<<<<
—Marchek (15:59:00/5-8-56)

>>>>>(It's not. Forget it. It's buildrek. All of it.)<<<<<
—Lacuna (16:05.25/5-8-56)

>>>>>(No, chummer, it's not buildrek. It explains some bad mojo that happened to me a couple of months ago. I was astrally projecting, taking a little jaunt across Panama, and I ... well, I hit something. One moment everything's chill, the next I'm real messed up. Ba-bing, I'm snapping back into my body. Took me three days to get over it. Real nasty—paranoia, hallucinations, ugly as snot. I figure I must have sashayed right through one of those foveae.)<<<<<
—Terrance (18:02:56/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Ouch. Can you spot those holes before you hit one?)<<<<<
—Gavin (18:03:54/5-8-56)

>>>>>(I didn't.)<<<<<
—Terrance (18:05:00/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Okay. Let's assume these things really are holes in earth's atmosphere. (And no, I haven't got a fragging clue how that could happen.) If that's true, then what happens is the same drek that happens when a magicker leaves the atmosphere (just like I explained it elsewhere on this board about two years ago).

See, there's nothing there—nothing outside the atmosphere, nothing in a fovea. The mage is like a balloon full of air taken into a vacuum (the fovea). If the mage tries to connect to astral space, it's like opening a pinhole in the balloon. Out flows all the air from the balloon into the vacuum. It drains the mage of all his magical energy, and maybe his life force too. Ouch is right. That's my scan on it.)<<<<<
—Evaine (19:00:53/5-8-56)

>>>>>(So where are these foveae? Around *teocalli*? No, that doesn't make any sense.

And who or what causes them? That's the big question.)<<<<<
—Aaron (19:22:05/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Don't know about you, omae, but I'm going to be real twitchy about doing any magical workings in Aztlan.

Hey, can those things spread?)<<<<<
—WizKid (20:01:25/5-8-56)

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Distressing. Very distressing.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I say again, Hecate you are being very quiet.

:::::[HECATE] What would you have me say? That I find such practices abhorrent? There, I've said it. Pleased?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] No, not really. You have a history of consorting with the abhorrent.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] ENOUGH! Do not have it out here! We are agreed! We are compacted! The past is the past!

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] The past is never behind us. We carry it with us always. The question is whether we remember all of it, or choose to remember only part.

FAST FACTS

>>>>>(Hey ho, it's me again. As I promised awhile back, here's the basic, elementary-school drek everyone should know about Aztlan (but is too dumb to ask). Don't worry, runners all—it's mercifully brief.)<<<<<

—W-boy (09:10:09/5-4-56)

>>>>>(Your patronizing tone is really starting to torque me off!)<<<<<

—Flashburn (23:10:10/5-4-56)

>>>>>(If you kids want to start a fistfight, take it elsewhere.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (24:00:01/5-4-56)

BERGTING 95

BORDERS

The contemporary nation of Aztlan borders four countries. To the north, it abuts the Confederated American States, the Pueblo Corporate Council, and California Free State. The border runs from just north of San Diego eastward, north of Tucson and Odessa, to pass directly through the city of Austin before looping southward. It passes 75 kilometers east of San Antonio before striking the Gulf coast between Brownsville (CAS) and Matamoros (Aztlan).

>>>>>(You're going to get some serious disagreements about that 75-klick figure, chummeroos.)<<<<<
—Spur (04:15:19/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Stress that again. Austin is a divided city, with all the assorted nastiness that status entails.)<<<<<
—Lewis (17:01:58/5-7-56)

Abiding by international treaties, Aztlan claims territorial waters out to 80 kilometers from shore. Predictably, this claim causes friction with its neighbors along the Gulf coast and around San Diego.

Aztlan's territory includes the Central American nations formerly known as Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama. It abuts the nation of Amazonia along a border that sweeps down from the southern tip of Lake Maracaibo (once Venezuela), runs south of Bucaramanga (Colombia), and passes just north of Bogotá. At that point the border swings west, passing 50 kilometers south of Cali to strike the Pacific coast on the Bahia Chocó. The border with Amazonia places a small portion of old Venezuela and about half of what used to be Colombia within Aztlan.

>>>>>(Couple of small details—niggling, but enough to get you killed if you're not up to speed. Bogotá, the onetime capital of Colombia, is officially in Amazonia. The Azzies have a different opinion on just where that line should be drawn. In my book, color Bogotá as "disputed territory."

On paper, Venezuela still exists as a sovereign state distinct from Amazonia. In practice, that "independence" is a joke. Venezuelan turf is limited to the region around Caracas, its capital, reaching out maybe 50 klicks from the city. It's like an Italian-style city-state, depending entirely on the good intentions of Amazonia for its continued existence.)<<<<<
—Leeza (23:14:06/5-10-56)

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] The Aztlaners know better than to contest Bogotá.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Still, I'd keep on eye on that border if I were you.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] You know something?

>>>>>(Sounds like Seattle, neh?)<<<<<
—Takano (01:09:19/5-11-56)

>>>>>(To a certain degree, yeah. "Seattle of the South"—"Seattle del Sur." I think I like that ...)<<<<<
—Leeza (21:27:32/5-11-56)

THE PANAMA CANAL

—Reprinted from *Discoveries*, a science and general-knowledge publication for high school students, fall 2054

Have you ever wondered how ships get from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean? You may never have thought about it, but ships *do* travel from one great ocean to the other. Today, much of the cargo carried from country to country around the world is transported by the huge airships, or "dirigibles," we so often see silently crossing the sky. Sea transport, however, is important for certain types of cargo and for routes or times when using a dirigible would be too slow or too dangerous. (Storms at the altitudes at which the dirigibles fly are often *much* more violent than those we feel on the surface of the earth.)

So how *do* these cargo ships travel from one ocean to the other? Around the Arctic coast of North America? Around Cape Horn at the southern tip of South America? No. These ships pass through the famous Panama Canal that cuts through the nation of Aztlan at a place called the Isthmus of Panama.

FROM ONE OCEAN TO ANOTHER

The Panama Canal—Canal de Panamá in the Aztlan language—runs from Cristóbal, a city on Limón Bay, which is part of the Caribbean Sea, to Balboa, on the Gulf of Panama, part of the Pacific Ocean. Because of the way the Isthmus of Panama twists, the Atlantic end of the canal at Cristóbal is actually to the west of the Pacific end ... even though the Atlantic Ocean is eastward of the Pacific Ocean. (Look at the map. It's true!)

>>>>>(W-boy, couldn't you have found an info source that doesn't insult our intelligence quite so much? Just asking ...)<<<<<

—Findler-Man (08:23:50/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Personally, I kind of like it. A guy gets tired of in-your-face all the fragging time.)<<<<<

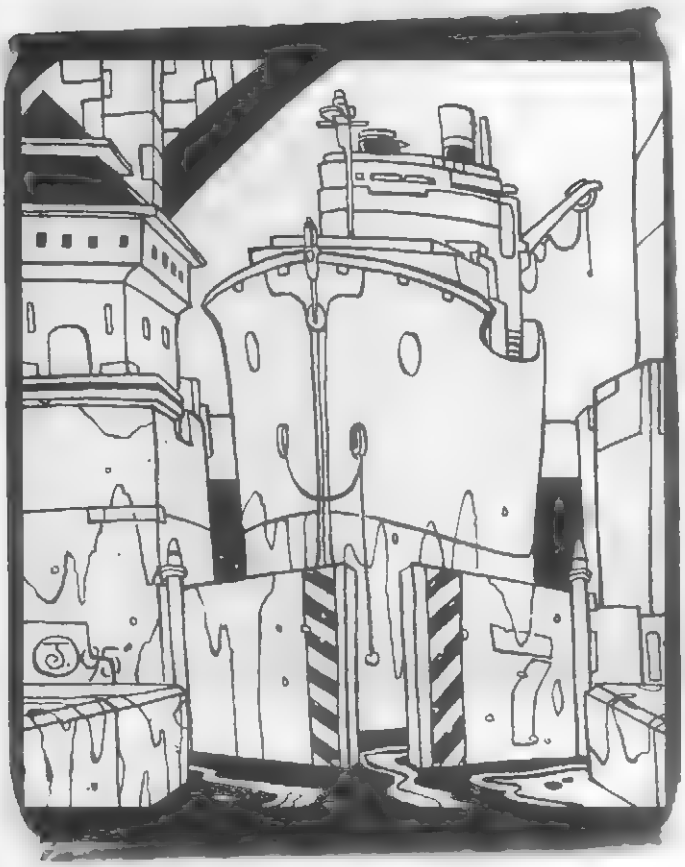
—Kwan the Oppressor (11:56:28/5-9-56)

The canal is a little more than 64 kilometers long (not including the dredged channels at each end). An average ship will take seven to eight hours to travel across it from one ocean to the other. At its narrowest point—a place called the Gaillard Cut—the canal is only 150 meters wide. Its minimum depth is 15 meters, which limits the size of ships that can use the canal.

ELEVATORS IN THE WATER

Different parts of the canal are at different heights. For example, the area called Gatun Lake is almost 26 meters above sea level. How do ships handle these changes in altitude? Through devices called "locks"—elevators in the water!

A ship traveling from one ocean to the other has to pass through six of these locks. Starting from Cristóbal, a ship is lifted a total of 25.9 meters by the three Gatun Locks to the level of Gatun Lake. All of these locks are double, so that one ship can be raised while another is being lowered! Once the ship has passed through Gatun Lake, it enters the Gaillard Cut. At the end of the Cut is the Pedro Miguel Lock, which lowers the ship by 9.4 meters to the level of the Miraflores Lake. The ship crosses the lake and enters the two Miraflores Locks, which lower the ship the 16.8 meters to the level of the Pacific Ocean.



>>>>>(If this is the way your mind works, the easiest way to block the canal is cack the locks. Jam the machinery, or—if you're a real hard-ass—sink a ship half-in and half-out of one of the locks. Bingo, traffic blocked.)<<<<<

—Bennett (14:09:15/5-9-56)

>>>>>(No drek, Dagwood. That's exactly what the Panamanian Freedom Front tried to do back in 2037. Didn't work worth squat, but more because of incompetence than because of any flaw in the plan. (How tough is it really to dial in the INS on a surface-to-surface missile, huh?) If the PFF had known what the frag they were doing, the missile they fired at the canal would have blown the drek out of the Pedro Miguel Lock rather than impacting on the mountain upslope from Red Tank. Idiots.)<<<<<

—Beowulf (13:37:03/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Ummm ... INS? Immigration and Naturalization Service?)<<<<<

—Niles (21:00:43/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Inertial Navigation System. Twinkie.)<<<<<

—Largo (01:06:12/5-12-56)

>>>>>(If you're looking to stop traffic with less collateral damage, take control of Madden Dam. The hydroelectric plant there supplies the electricity for canal operations, and the water reservoir can have strategic uses for altering the water flowing through the canal itself.)<<<<<

—Savvy Sam (11:30:09/5-15-56)

Though the canal is not as important as it once was, a lot of traffic still makes its way across the Isthmus of Panama. In 2053, 9,250 ships passed through the canal, carrying a grand total of 111 billion metric tons of cargo.

>>>>>(Anyone got a nuyen value on that cargo?)<<<<<

—Razor (23:16:04/5-18-56)

>>>>>(I remember hearing a figure of something like 600 trillion nuyen a year ... but don't quote me on that. One thing's stone, though, buds: that strip of water is valuable.)<<<<<

—Mindy (15:11:42/5-19-56)

HISTORY OF THE CANAL

In this day and age, it's sometimes hard to believe that important features of our lives have been around for many years, based on old ideas. In this world of high technology, it's easy to think of past generations as incapable of attaining anything lasting. This is not true in many cases, of course, and the Panama Canal is a sterling example.

The idea of a canal crossing the Isthmus of Panama dates back as far as 1523, though construction of the canal as we know it did not get under way until 1906, almost 400 years later. The canal was expected to take 10 years to complete, but the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers managed to finish the job in less. The canal was operational by the summer of 1914.

The Zone

The Panama Canal Zone—a strip of land about 20 kilometers wide, following the canal route—was originally considered United States territory even though it cut right through the middle of the country of Panama. A treaty signed in 1903 granted this land to the U.S. in perpetuity (forever), but during the 1960s and 1970s the Panamanians began to complain about what they considered a major and unacceptable giveaway. In 1979, the United States signed a treaty in which it agreed to turn the Canal Zone over to Panama. While the U.S. remained responsible for the canal's maintenance and defense, Panama increased its share of responsibility for running it. In the year 2000, Panama assumed complete control over the Canal Zone.

The first decades of the 21st century were kind to Panama. The country's economy boomed, helped by the service fees it received from corporations that wanted to use the canal. The Panamanian government used some of the money it received to enlarge areas of the canal and improve the lock machinery.

>>>>>("Service fees"? Extortion, more like. Daylight fragging robbery. The Canal Commission (no, I'm not going to give the Spanish version) shook down anyone and everyone who wanted to use the canal. Panama made its way to the top of everyone's drek-list in a real hurry.)<<<<<

—Miki (04:34:37/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Why didn't the megacorps do something about it?)<<<<<
—Werewolf (12:13:48/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Read on.)<<<<<
—Doc (10:20:14/5-10-56)

Good Times, Bad Times

While Panama made a successful effort to bolster its own economy, the United States also provided an ongoing financial assist to protect their own interests. When forced to deal, one after another, with the rise to power of the megacorporations, the Great Ghost Dance, the VITAS plague, and the Computer Crash, the United States' own troubles escalated out of control. Suddenly, finding a solution to their internal problems took precedence over retaining control of a comparatively minor concern in a faraway country, and even before the UCAS came into being, aid to Panama ended. Beginning in the late 2020s, the country fell on hard times. Rebel factions from within the country and military forces from outside shook Panamanian society to the core. As a result, its economy weakened and ultimately collapsed. By 2044, the country could no longer maintain the canal, and in 2046 a landslide in the Gaillard Cut closed the canal to all but the smallest ships.

>>>>>(There you go, Werewolf. Many of those "rebel factions" and "military forces" were funded, supported, or commanded by various megacorporations. The canal was so potentially valuable that none of the major megacorps wanted to let the Corporate Court take control of it. After all, Corp Court control meant corporate rivals would have access to the canal as well. Not ideal, from the biggies' point of view. So triple-A corps like Ares, Fuchi, and Saeder-Krupp squabbled over Panama and the canal like wolves over a chunk of meat ... fragging near tearing their prize to shreds in the process. Meanwhile, the contesting corps' representatives in Zurich-Orbital effectively deadlocked the Corporate Court.)<<<<<
—Doc (10:23:43/5-10-56)

Following this disaster, Aztlan moved forces south into Panama at the request of the Panamanian government and took on the job of clearing and maintaining the canal. When the Panamanian government collapsed two years later, Aztlan took on the job of maintaining the country, too, and Panama became a permanent part of Aztlan.

>>>>>(It sounds almost innocuous, described like that. Here's how it really shook out.

Starting around 2040, Aztlan went to work destabilizing the Central American countries. (Not too tough a job; they weren't all that stable to begin with.) The Azzies probably didn't have to work too hard with Panama because of the way the megacorps were hashing over it. By '43 or '44, the Panamanian government was ripe for takeover. The biggest of the opposition parties was an Azzie shell, and in the special elections in late 2045 the Azzie stooges took power. Aztlan was ready to swallow Panama. All it needed was an excuse.

It got one in 2046, when the Gaillard Cut conveniently collapsed. (Don't get me going on that conspiracy theory ...) The puppet government "invited" Azzie engineers and troops into the country to fix up and protect the canal "for the greater good of the world's economy" or some flaming drek.

The Azzies had what they wanted: the canal. They kept the Panamanian puppet government going for a couple more years (about the length of world media's attention span these days) and then quietly closed it out. Panama became another Aztlan state, and Aztlan (read "Aztechnology") had the canal.

I love it when a plan comes together.)<<<<<
—T-Square (03:17:42/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Paranoid buildrek.)<<<<<
—Rory (15:04:23/5-11-56)

>>>>>(No, it's stone. T-Square's got the clean goods. I was in Panama back in 2043 on a Fuchi merc contract. Me and my boys, we saw what was going down and we told our handlers at Fuchi about it. They flipped us off, didn't think Aztlan was anything to worry about. Megacorporate mindset, you ask me. Get too used to thinking of national governments as irrelevant. Back in '43, not many people realized that the Aztlan national government was a megacorp.)<<<<<
—Colonel Cobra (12:21:13/5-12-56)

Soon after acquiring the Canal Zone, however, Aztlan gave it up to other interests. In 2048, the Aztlan government came to a friendly agreement with the Corporate Court in Zurich-Orbital. Under this agreement, the Canal Zone became a "megacorporate protectorate" under the authority of the Corporate Court. The "Pan-Corporate Zone" as we know it today follows the same borders as the old Canal Zone. It has the same rights as any independent country in the world, and the Zone governor—at this writing a woman named Toko Baisetsu—is considered a head of state equivalent to the UCAS president.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Cat, do you get much grief from the Corporate Court?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Yes. I suspect for the same reasons you do.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Indeed.

>>>>>(How sweet, a "friendly agreement." Didn't have anything to do with the megacorporate attack on Ensenada, did it? Or the Veracruz Settlement? Of course not.)<<<<<
—T-Square (03:19:14/5-11-56)

>>>>>(You gotta admit, the real buzz might be a tad too twisted for school kids ...)<<<<<
—Laker Girl (07:32:50/5-11-56)

The Pan-Corporate Zone has no army of its own. Instead, the Corporate Court provides it with the troops it needs to defend its

borders—and the all-important canal, of course! Today, from the decks of a ship sailing through the Panama Canal, you can see a rainbow of uniforms among the soldiers who patrol the canal's shores: the red-and-navy of Renraku, the pale blue of Mitsuhama, the grays of Fuchi, the jade green of Yamatetsu.

>>>>>(All but the dust-ochre of Aztechnology. And that's got to slot the Azzies off in a big way.)<<<<<
—Sinister Sal (22:55:42/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Better than getting one of your cities nuked to glass.)<<<<<
—Atropos (00:01:19/5-11-56)

>>>>>(You talking the Ensenada raid? Chummer, that's anticorp agitprop. All that Big Gun drek is just that—drek. The megas talked like they had a nuclear gun to Aztlan's head, but it never happened.)<<<<<
—Raiko (06:15:35/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Wrong. That report earlier on in this post just confirmed my suspicions. Ares—at the very fragging least—is nuke-capable, and was nuke-capable six-seven years back. Count on it.)<<<<<
—Atropos (20:21:43/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Well, yes. There is that pesky recurring rumor that Ares has Fractional-Orbit Bombardment Systems (FOBS, those satellite-to-ground delivery systems) up on the high frontier, and that some of the FOBS birds are packing operational-yield nukes ("operational" being between "tactical" and "strategic"). Call it a nominal 200 kilotons as a starting point.

Obviously, Ares is nuke-capable, FOBS or no (recent events in Chi-town might prove that). A handful of other corps may be, too. Whether they'd have dusted Ensenada if Aztlan hadn't rolled over—whether they even threatened to do it—well, that's another question entirely.)<<<<<
—Webster (20:56:18/5-11-56)

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Is this true?? Is Ares Macrotechnology nuclear capable??

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Yes.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Was theirs the weapon in Chicago?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Yes.

:::::[HECATE] How many of these megacorporations have nuclear weapons??

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] The capability, or a stockpile?

:::::[HECATE] Both.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Most have nuclear weapons. Few, excepting Ares, Saeder-Krupp, and Mitsuhama, have more than a token assortment.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Lofwyr has a nuclear weapon?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Of course. Wonderful irony, isn't it?

POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

>>>>>(I know you folks won't feel at home until you see this old chestnut, so here it is. (Never say I didn't do anything for you.))<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (20:42:00/5-1-56)

FACTS AT A GLANCE

Population: 134,220,400

Human: 67%
Elf: 15%
Dwarf: 6%
Ork: 9%
Troll: 1%
Other: 2%

SINless Population: 10,000,000 (est.)
Per Capita Income: 15,400,000 pesos
Below Poverty Level: 21%
On Fortune's Active Traders List: 3%
Corporate Affiliation: 57%
Education:

High School Equivalency: 33%
College Equivalency: 42%
Advanced Studies Certificates: 13%

>>>>>(Okay, folks, let's get quibbling.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (20:43:05/5-1-56)

>>>>>(A population of 134-plus million? I thought the population of Mexico back at the end of the last century—pre-VITAS—was well under 100 mil. Take into account the hordes who kicked off because of the bug, and the population growth is just rude. These Azzies make fragging rabbits look like monks.)<<<<<

—Roscoe (03:22:13/5-7-56)

>>>>>(It's true, the population of Mexico 65 years ago (1990 census) was 81,140,922. And true, official figures state that more than eight million died during the VITAS epidemic and its aftermath. (Unofficial figures—which I'd be inclined to believe—put the figure at more than 10 million deaders.)

But remember, the 81 million figure is for Mexico as it was then—not including the other Central American nations the Azzies absorbed and definitely not including Austin, San Antonio and San Diego. According to my figures, the population that lives inside the old Mexican borders only amounts to about 87 million. That's a population increase of 22 percent since the end of the VITAS pandemic. Pretty good, but the rabbits still have the advantage.)<<<<<

—Holly (17:20:16/5-10-56)

URBAN/RURAL POPULATION BREAKDOWN

Approximately 79 percent of Aztlan's population lives in urban areas. This percentage is still increasing, but very slowly. The per capita income figure is somewhat misleading. In urban centers, the annual figure is 17.5 million pesos (35,000 nuyen); in rural areas, however, it drops to 7.5 million pesos (15,000 nuyen).

>>>>>(Lower than that, I'd wager. The majority of the SINless live in those rural areas, and you can bet they drag down the average a good whack.)<<<<<

—Auntie Social (08:17:16/5-9-56)

CULTURAL GROUPS

Aztlan comprises three major cultural groups: those of Spanish descent, those of Mesoamerind descent, and those of mixed Spanish and Mesoamerind extraction—the *mestizos*. The *mestizos* are by far the largest group, comprising almost 70 percent of the population.

During the late 20th century, the Mesoamerind segment comprised 30 percent of the population of Mexico and its neighbors. Today, non-*mestizo* Mesoamerinds make up only 17 percent of the population. All three groups have been "diluted" by interbreeding with immigrant populations.

Socioeconomic class tends to correlate with cultural grouping. Aztlaners of Spanish descent are disproportionately represented in the highest socioeconomic strata, Mesoamerinds in the lowest.

>>>>>(Frag. Don't some things ever change?)<<<<<

—NiteSpawn (07:26:13/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Wait one, I think I recognize that pedantic style. Cap, you scammed this drek from a Danchekker's Primer, didn't you? The same slub who spewed out Native American Nations, volumes 1 and 2. Am I right?)<<<<<

—Sal (11:31:56/5-10-56)

>>>>>(<chuckle> I wondered if anybody would see me palm that card. Right in one, Sal, the good Dr. David Danchekker™ strikes again ...)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:46:58/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Why's the Mesoamerind percentage dropped so much? Pogroms?)<<<<<

—Railgun (23:17:18/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Nothing so obviously nasty, Railgun ol' chummerino. Couple of reasons, quite legitimate and aboveboard. First, the Mesoamerinds have always been dirt-poor and often beyond the reach of the country's medical services. While the "traditionals" (as the Mesoamerinds are often called) were always masters of the native herbal medicine drek, a bunch of herbs couldn't save them from VITAS. A bunch cacked it during the pandemic. Second, populations dilute. "Pure" forms will generally shift into "hybrid" forms if nothing else interferes. Over time, unless they're real hard-nosed about "keeping it in the family," Mesoamerinds inevitably slip over the classification line and become mestizos.

(Yeah, I know it's a simplification. If anybody wants to get down and dirty about ethnological drift, e-mail me.) And finally, populations tend to lose vigor without the occasional fillip to the breeding stock and gene pool. Unfortunately for the traditionals, that kind of fillip is probably going to yield mestizos. (Again a simplification, and again ... bite me.))<<<<<

—Socio Pat (10:54:40/5-12-56)

>>>>>(What about intolerance among metatypes?)<<<<<

—MOM (17:11:47/5-13-56)

>>>>>(The text hints at it, but doesn't say it right out.

The situation's quite different down in Aztlan than in most of North America (UCAS particularly). In UCAS, one of the first things people notice about you is metatype, followed closely by skin color. Most prejudice is based on those two things. "Pure-Breed Humans Are the Earth-Mother's Only Legitimate Children." "If you ain't ork, you ain't squat." That kind of attitude (to quote a couple of bumper stickers I've seen in Seattle).

In Aztlan, first and most important—always!—is cultural grouping. Are you a peninsular—an Azzie of proper Spanish descent? Are you a *mestizo*? Are you a traditional? This distinction makes the difference in Aztlan society. Metatype is a secondary consideration. Within the three major "castes"—peninsular, *mestizo* and traditional—there's the usual hierarchy based on metatype. But a troll peninsular (for example) tends to be way up the social scale from a human or elf *mestizo*. (Or down the scale, depending on whose scale it is, of course.))<<<<<

—Socio Pat (10:52:06/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Simplification, chummer—nova simplification. But true, more or less.)<<<<<

—Holly (00:10:46/5-15-56)

NON-(META)HUMAN SENTIENTS

The percentage of non-(meta)human sentients in the Aztlan population is more than twice as high as the global average. This abnormally large population segment includes dracoforms, shapeshifters, and a surprising number of free spirits of various kinds. (Rumors that banshees are accepted as full members of Aztlan society are unfounded.) The majority of Aztlan dracoforms are feathered serpents, though Occidental and Oriental dragons also live in the nation.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Occidental dragons??

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I believe the author is referring to what the humans call "western" dragons. Or perhaps simply non-"Oriental."

>>>>>(Shapeshifters, gaah. I've never felt comfortable around them, I'll admit it. There's something downright fragging wrong about talking biz with a "person" who was a fragging jaguar up to a few minutes ago. (It gets worse when I hear his stomach rumble in the middle of negotiations, and I realize I'm potential lunch. He's gotta feel the way I would if I was negotiating with a soyburger.))<<<<<

—Jimjim (00:24:56/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Concur, JJ. But shapeshifters are a real-and-for-true fact of life in Az. Jaguar (or puma; I can't tell the difference, personally) shapeshifters aren't the most common, but they are the ones you're most likely to meet. (Jag shapeshifters tend not to care about keeping a low profile.) Other brands you might meet include bears, wolves/coyotes, and—no drek—seals.)<<<<<

—Doc (08:57:21/5-10-56)

Unlike most other nations throughout the world, Aztlan grants citizenship and full rights to any and all free spirits requesting such status. Banishing a free-spirit citizen of the nation is considered murder.

>>>>>(And "I didn't know he/she/it was a citizen" don't cut no ice with the judiciary.)<<<<<

—Legal Beagle (18:22:09/5-10-56)

>>>>>(When the text says "spirits" I always think in terms of the usual suspects: Hearth, Mountain, Forest, Lake, drekcetera. But there's different additions to the mix down Aztlan way, and if anybody's ever cataloged them all I haven't seen the data.

Give you an example for free: there's a local variant of Man-of-the-woods (see Patterson's **Paranormal Animals of North America** for details) called the Hada. Apparently, whole "tribes" of these Hada live in the jungles down south, in what used to be Colombia.)<<<<<

—Doc (10:49:15/5-11-56)

Much has been written in various popular publications about why there seem to be so many non-(meta)human sentients in Aztlan. Proposed explanations range from a theoretical "spike" in Awakening caused by mana "hot spots" to equally unproved conspiracy theories. In fact, the answer is probably much more mundane. Some studies indicate that the actual incidence of non-(meta)human sentients is the same (within statistically significant limits) in Aztlan as it is elsewhere in the world. The difference in population figures reflects a cultural, rather than biological, distinction. Aztlan society accepts many non-(meta)human sentients as citizens and includes these individuals in official population figures. In other nations, these sentients are often barred from citizenship, excluded from society, and even hunted in extreme cases. Needless to say, they do not appear in population analyses.

>>>>>(Danchekker's got a good point. It would certainly skew the population figures in Seattle (for example) if vampires, dzoo-noo-qua, wendigo, loup-garou, the various shapeshifters, and the rest got included in the pool.

However, I think Danchekker's flippant dismissal of mana hot spots and Awakening "spikes" is ... well, flippant. These things do happen. Maybe not with the non-(meta)human sentients in Aztlan, but certainly elsewhere.)<<<<<

—Doc (10:51:27/5-11-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Do they truly not understand what's going on in their own world? I am continually amazed.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I do not seem to remember reading any publication revealing the reality behind your nation and her magics, my Lady.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] Touché.

CLIMATE

The Tropic of Cancer bisects Aztlan, cutting across the nation from about 30 kilometers north of Mazatlán on the west coast, to 130 kilometers north of Tampico on the east coast. This means that more than half of the nation's land area is part of the Torrid Zone.

TEMPERATURE

In general, altitude has more of an effect on climate than latitude does. Aztlan natives tend to divide their nation into *tierra caliente* (hot land), *tierra templada* (temperate land), and *tierra fria* (cold land).

The *tierra caliente* includes the low coastal plains, extending from sea level to an altitude of about 914 meters (approximately 3,000 feet). Temperatures range from about 16° to 50° Celsius (about 60° to 120° Fahrenheit), with high humidity. The *tierra templada* extends from 914 meters up to about 1,830 meters above sea level (3,000 to 6,000 feet). Temperatures in this region range from about 17° to 21° C (62° to 70° F). The *tierra fria* extends from 1,830 meters to 2,745 meters above sea level. Here, the average temperature fluctuates between 15° to 17° C (59° to 63° F).

>>>>>(I guess "cold" is a relative term, neh?)<<<<<

—Libbie (07:13:13/5-9-56)

PRECIPITATION

Throughout most of Aztlan, the rainy season runs from May to October. In the southern areas of the country, annual rainfall ranges from about 990 to 4,000 millimeters (39 to 157 inches). Much of the country lacks adequate rainfall for efficient agriculture, however, making life difficult for the subsistence farmers. Average rainfall in the *tierra templada* is less than 635 millimeters (25 inches) per year. In the *tierra fria*, the figure drops to about 460 millimeters (18 inches), and in the semiarid north precipitation averages around 254 millimeters (10 inches).

>>>>>(It's easy to forget what a wide range of climates modern Aztlan covers. Up north, you've got the central plateau, which is an extension of the plains in southwestern North America (UCAS and Pueblo). Baja, and along the coast of the Gulf of California (Azzies prefer to call it the Sea of Cortez), are fragging deserts. But when you get down into the northern portions of South America—what used to be Colombia—you're into heavy rain forest. Down there, the weather patterns have gotten kinda screwed up by Azzie weather magics, and rainfall's maybe 30 percent more than it was back in the Fifth World.)<<<<<

—Woppler the Weatherman (12:42:15/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Okay, sure, why not raise the question now? What the frag's going on with the Amazonians anyway? I keep hearing about all the heavy mondo juju they're trucking out. Don't know about you, priyatel, but it sounds like something out of a data tabloid screamsheet. What's the clean goods?)<<<<<

—Farrakh (23:26:15/5-13-56)

:::::[HECATE] This should be interesting ...

>>>>>(That is the clean goods, Farrakh: the Amazonians are trucking out heavy mondo juju.

You know how the rainforest got wasted during the last century and into the early part of this century? When that cabal of Awakened creatures took over the government of what they call Amazonia, they decided right quick this must stop. Because so much damage had already been done, things continued to slide: erosion of topsoil, farting cows blasting out methane, all that trip. So they fired up heavy-duty rituals to turn things around. (Okay, now don't quote me on this, but I think they're using something like the Great Ghost Dance with a solid South American flavor.)

And things have been turning around. Cows out, slash-and-burn farmers out, rain forests back with a vengeance. In almost less time than it took to clear-cut the region in the first place, the big trees are back. Some people think the Amazonians have gone more than a tad too far with this thing. In lots of places, the rain forests are growing so freakin' fast that keeping them from overrunning towns, roads, and even cities has become like full-time warfare. Predictably, this kind of heavy-duty messing with How Things Work has drekked with the weather patterns. Hence things are a tad wetter in southern Aztlan than they used to be.)<<<<<

—Webster (05:05:33/5-14-56)

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] I will pre-empt everyone's obvious question: no, we are not using one of the Great Rituals to empower the forest.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] You have a Locus point, do you not? Intact?

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Yes.

:::::[HECATE] <UNTRANSLATABLE>

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ironic, yes, that the near-death of us all brings new life to the world?

:::::[HECATE] That was always the intent.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I will not dignify that with a response.

>>>>>(That biz about having to fight back the jungle isn't limited to Amazonian territory. Same thing's going on in southern Aztlan (Way I hear it, the people of Medellín hate it big-time. Every morning the locals have to go out and chop back the fragging jungles that are marching down from the mountains overlooking the city.)

And the Azzies aren't too happy about it. They're calling the whole thing "economic warfare," and there's talk about demanding reparations from Amazonia or there'll be hell to pay. (The Amazonians respond with a big Latin shrug and go on breeding jungle.))<<<<<

—Rico (22.27:10/5-14-56)

>>>>>(In reference to some posts elsewhere in this file ... aren't the Amazonians making "blood magic?" And isn't that a Bad Thing?)<<<<<

—Marlinspike (15:16:55/5-16-56)

>>>>>(My take on the topic is yes, it is blood magic. And yes, I think it is a Bad Thing. (Check my posts in the Government and Politics file.)<<<<<

—Magister (03:46:02/5-17-56)

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] This seems to imply you are using at least third or fourth stage Lesser Rituals.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Things are not easy. Even with the Locus we must supplement the forces. We are, however, being very careful. Laughing Man, you will not have to repeat your actions because of us.

:::::>THE LAUGHING MAN TIPS HIS HAT

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I still say we should have killed Coleman.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I do not seem to remember you being part of, or even caring about, such things then. Besides, the outcome was required.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] But it did not need to happen that way.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] True.

TOPOGRAPHY

Most of Aztlan is a large, elevated plateau flanked by mountain ranges. These two ranges drop off to narrow plains along the east and west coasts of the nation.

Mountains

The two mountain chains—the Sierra Madre Occidental to the west and the Sierra Madre Oriental to the east—meet in an area known as La Junta, roughly southeast of Tenochtitlán. From there, the mountains continue south in a single range known as the Sierra Madre del Sur. This network of volcanic mountains includes the highest peaks in the nation.

>>>>>(T-bird jammers take definite note. The Sierra Madre Occidental is a continuation of the Rockies (more or less). That's right, boys and girls, a continuation of the good ol' Autobahn!!! If you've got the balls and the gear, you can rod your rail right the way down from Salish-Shidhe turf into deepest, darkest Aztlan.)<<<<<

—Monica Em (01:22:17/5-13-56)

>>>>>(You're a fragging twink if you try it. You don't think maybe—just maybe—the Azzie forces set up to hold back the Pueblos might be keeping an eye on the best routes? Monica, if you want to lose your bird and your life, gimme your rig and then put a pistol in your mouth. That way at least someone benefits.)<<<<<

—Rat-tail (09:28:52/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Back off the Em-girl, old man. Just 'cause you're losing it doesn't mean everyone else has to get a case of the freaks. ("Oh oh, better put on a sweater, dear, mama's feeling cold.") I've run my rig right on through those oh-so-tuff border forces like they wasn't even there. Starting from Phoenix, I ran past Tucson right down as far as Tónichi on the Yaqui River (150 klicks southeast of Hermosillo, for you know-nothings). And the ol' Gray Ghost and me, we fed dust and chaff to any and all Azzies who maybe were looking for us. Offloaded my cargo, then I ran the same fragging route in reverse.

Hey, if anyone wants to offer me the contract, I'll take cargo from Phoenix right down into fragging Amazonia, right down the Isthmus. Relay at NA/CAS-TX 8303 (00-0914).)<<<<<

—Zack (16:48:32/5-17-56)

>>>>>(Bucko, you try it you're a dead man. I seen enough funeral pyres in the Madre. You gonna be one of them.)<<<<<

—Colón (21:57:06/5-17-56)

The highest mountain is Volcán Tajumulco, in the former nation of Guatemala, with a height of 4,570 meters (about 15,000 feet). Tajumulco is currently quiescent and has been since its last major eruption in 2027. Though it is not venting gas or magma, activity is still occurring; since 2027, the height of Tajumulco has increased to 4,570 meters from 4,220 meters. That is an increase of 350 meters, or 1,150 feet.

>>>>>(350 meters in 27 years? That's quiescent?)<<<<<

—Boomer Dean (13:22:15/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Compared to 27 years ago? Betcherass. Explosive eruptions, pyroclastic flows, ash-falls ... ? Thousands dead in the nearby villages and towns? Yeah, it's quiescent.)<<<<<

—Joseph (22:53:04/5-10-56)

Many other active volcanoes exist throughout Aztlan, including Volcán Tacaná (4,053 meters), Volcán de Colima (3,850 m), Citlaltépetl (5,747 meters), Popocatépetl (5,452 meters), and more than 100 others.

>>>>>(Popocatépetl's active? Thought it was dormant.)<<<<<

—Largo (00:01:34/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Used to be. Bunch of mountains down Aztlan way have cleared their throats again. My guess is, it's got something to do with the Great Ghost Dance (and who knows, maybe the Amazonian equivalent), but mainly the cycle's turning. Mesoamerica's always been a volcanic hot-spot (earthquakes, too, of course), being on the Pacific Ring of Fire and all. (Aaah, the wonders of subduction and uplift ... geology joke.) Even without the Dance, I'd guess most of the current volcanoes would have gone active. At most, the Dance sped up the process a tad.)<<<<<

— Joseph (22:54:38/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Joe's right, it's nothing new. Volcanoes could be a fragging cash crop, if the Azzies could only find a buyer. Earthquakes too.

Personal aside: I was almost a Guest of Honor at the most recent destruction of Managua during the 2046 earthquake. Flew out the day before. Otherwise, I could well have been one of the 14,000+ deaders.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (00:21:09/5-15-56)

>>>>>(And while we're on the topic, let's put a few things in perspective. You know how the media was rattling on about the civil war in Nicaragua that led to the Aztlan annexation, about the all-fired tragedy of 9,000 innocent civilians geeked? Chummer, civil wars, even the nastiest, are small potatoes compared to natural disasters, and don't let the news-snoops tell you different. In Managua alone, in the last 75 years, more than 24,000 innocent civilians have cacked off as a result of earthquakes.)<<<<<

—Arnie-Lad (11:54:08/5-20-56)

>>>>>(Question for any tech-heads out there. Crap belching out of an erupting volcano, even a "quiet" eruption, is going to cock up sensors, right? So how about "screening" an inbound t-bird around some of those spitting mountains?)<<<<<

—Larkspur (16:55:02/5-22-56)

>>>>>(Hm. Interesting thought.)<<<<<

—Dorin (00:50:21/5-23-56)

>>>>>(Forget it. Gonna frag up your own sensors just as bad; worse, maybe.)<<<<<

— Colón (22:39:37/5-23-56)

The coastal plains are low, sandy and flat. The Yucatán peninsula is also low and flat, with an average elevation of 30 meters.

Rivers and Lakes

Aztlan has few major rivers, most of which are not navigable. The longest is the Río Bravo del Norte, known in the CAS and UCAS as the Rio Grande.

The largest inland bodies of water are Lake Chapala and Lago de Azatlán (formerly known as Lago de Nicaragua). Most other lakes in the nation are shallow.

Harbors

Aztlan has relatively few good harbors, largely because of the sandy soil of the coastal plains. Major harbors include Tampico, Veracruz Llave, Coatzacoalcos (once known as Puerto México), Acapulco de Juárez, Manzanillo, Mazatlán, Salina Cruz, Balboa, Cartagena and Buenaventura.

GETTING IN

>>>>>(All you people out there slavering for "practical information," here's the file you've been waiting for. If you can get past the bureaucratese, you might be able to use some of the gen here—if you're careful and lucky, that is. It's kind of fun to speculate on where Espectro came up with his sources. In this case, I'd say he got hold of his corp's classified documents and pulled the file created by the UCAS government and stolen by Aztechnology—as a matter of course—in the corp's ongoing effort to keep tabs on how much other political and economic powers know about Azzie biz.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:26:15/5-2-56)

BERETTA

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BRIEF

Evaluate techniques for covert insertion of assets into Aztlan territory. Secondary brief: evaluate techniques for covert extraction, both unhindered and opposed. Secondary brief is considered minor.

Constraints: minimal supporting resources, deniability (preference), ease of termination (preference).

INTRODUCTION

This report evaluates the practicalities of inserting assets into Aztlan territory and, as a secondary concern, extracting them upon mission completion. Assume that minimal resources will be assigned to the insertion/extraction. Full deniability and terminability are desired, but not absolutely necessary.

ORGANIZATION

This report discusses the different insertion channels open to a ConsOps asset, describing in detail expected security provisions where possible and appropriate, and proposes effective countermeasures. Where appropriate, background data is provided to support the analyses and discussions on extraction are included in these subsections. Insertion via the Yucatán is a special case with its own opportunities and risks, and is therefore a distinct subsection.

>>>>>(ConsOps—Consular Operations. Consular Operations? Something to do with consulates, neh? So how come this guvmint man talks like a spook?)<<<<<

—Marky (12:01:10/5-6-56)

>>>>>("Spook" is right. They don't come much spookier than ConsOps. They're the varsity of "direct action"—intelligence-gathering, counterintelligence, counterespionage, and all that trip. All the advantages of the CIA, none of the disadvantages. Similar technological expertise, and squat in terms of Congressional oversight. Ever since the CIA turned from a bunch of cowboys into a top-heavy bureaucracy, the ConsOps gillettes have done all the real hard-core stuff, right the way up to and including assassinations. (Generally not foreign heads of state, but that's because the last few UCAS presidents have been wussies ...)

These guys are the hard-asses to end all hard-asses. If you've ever met one and you're still alive, it's because that's the way he or she wanted it.)<<<<<

—Akula (16:55.07/5-6-56)

CONVENTIONAL CHANNELS

This section assumes that the inserted asset has access to identification and supporting datawork capable of withstanding scrutiny.

IMMIGRATION DATAWORK

Noncitizens can use two channels of authorized immigration: travel visas and resident alien status. Both are time limited, restricted in various ways, and revocable at any time.

Travel Visas

The travel visa is the simplest datawork to acquire, but the least useful for ConsOps assets. As far as the Aztlan government is concerned, anyone may apply for this visa. (Certain nations, such as Tír Tairngire, Tír na nÓg, Tsimshian, and various of the Italian city-states, prohibit their citizens from traveling to Aztlan except on government-approved business. Currently, the UCAS has no such restrictions; analysts believe this unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.)

Applications may be made in person at any Aztlan consulate or embassy. Applicants must present full personal identification data, which is downloaded from the applicant's credstick into the Aztlan system. Alternatively, the application can be made directly through the Matrix (NA/AZ-SU (5)33-4228(0)1). Records analysis shows a 17 percent ± 0.5 percent higher incidence of acceptance for in-person applications.

Aztlan Immigration runs a background check on the datawork through established Matrix connections. All applications are accepted or rejected within two weeks; applicants are notified via Matrix electronic mail. The Aztlan government reserves the right to reject any application without reason, and there is no channel of appeal. Analysis of application records has deduced the following reasons for rejection (predictive correlation 98 percent):

- Record of public protest against the Aztlan government
- Criminal record (felony)
- HMHVV-positive blood test (certain exceptions apply)
- Employment (direct or indirect, present or past) with Ares Macrotechnology
- Membership or affiliation with Universal Brotherhood (see file reference Quietus-003-55755)
- Amazonian citizenship or palpable links with Amazonia
- "Restricted" cyberware: implanted weapons (including toxin exhalers), boosted or wired reflexes, tactical computer, cranial cyberdecks

Of all rejected applications, 17.4 percent did not meet any of these criteria, implying either additional criteria beyond the capability of analysis, or else a highly arbitrary system.

>>>>>(Why not stress it again—you need a SIN to apply. One that's going to stand up to a background check.)<<<<<
—Miki (13:01:59/5-8-56)

The fact that all background checks are conducted through UCAS databases gives ConsOps considerable freedom in creating acceptable "legends" for assets. (Obvious contra-indications exist in the case of restricted cyberware; a simple check at the border may detect the discrepancy.) As will be seen, however, the restrictions associated with travel visas more than outweigh these advantages.

>>>>>(<Sigh> Think about that, shadow-babies, and whimper. Think of the nuyen and skullsweat it takes to gen up a fake ident. These ConsOps slags, they just tell their bosses what they want and they get it ... and the ident is legal, for frag's sake. The government entered it into the government database. Doesn't come much more legal than that. <Sigh>)<<<<<
—Lace (17:09:13/5-7-56)

Restrictions: The maximum duration for a travel visa is 120 days from date of issue, or 60 days from date of entry into Aztlan (whichever expires first). Aztlan Immigration also issues shorter-term visas. Depending on the circumstances, a visitor still in the country with an expired visa might be deported immediately or prosecuted.

>>>>>(Make that "persecuted." Sometimes they just disappear.)<<<<<
—Miki (19:08:21/5-7-56)

Travel visas may be revoked at any time, without notice and without appeal, even in absentia.

>>>>>(Translation: First warning you get that the Immigration suits in Tenochtitlán have revoked your visa is when the Policía kick in your hotel-room door and scoop you up.)<<<<<
—Miki (19:09:00/5-7-56)

At his or her port of entry, a visitor under a travel visa must provide the authorities with a detailed itinerary of his or her stay in Aztlan. This itinerary must include information on accommodation, often including proof of hotel reservations, and all travel plans within the country. At Immigration's discretion, a visitor who diverges from this registered itinerary in any way may be deemed "in violation" with all attendant consequences. On examination of records, enforcement of this at first seems arbitrary, but in fact is not. Even major variances are often ignored, in cases where no other reason exists for the authorities to take note of the visitor. The most minor variance, however, frequently becomes a convenient rationale for ejecting a potential troublemaker.

Holders of travel visas may not carry weapons of any kind into the country, and are forbidden to buy or otherwise acquire weapons of any kind within Aztlan's borders. The same is true for cyberdecks of any configuration. (No restrictions exist on palmtop or pocket computers, or any system without ASIST technology.) Possession of any such restricted item leads to prosecution. Even proximity to such items is occasionally grounds for visa revocation.

>>>>>(Starting to see the downside of the "easy access" travel visa? If you so much as come near a typical shadowrunner's

play-toys, you'll be heaved back out of the country. Mo' bettah to follow another route.)<<<<<

—Sydney (07:18:28/5-11-56)

Resident Alien Status

As for a travel visa, personal application for resident alien status must be made at an Aztlan consulate or embassy, or an application may be routed via the Matrix directly to the Aztlan Immigration Services in Tenochtitlán (again, NA/AZ-SU (5)33-4228(0)1). Appropriate personal identification must be provided, and a thorough background check will be performed through established Matrix channels.

Criteria for acceptance and rejection appear to be the same as for travel visas. No reason need be given for rejection, and applicants may not appeal the decision. The primary criterion for resident alien status, above and beyond the requirements for a traveler's visa, is a confirmed offer of employment from a company registered to do business in Aztlan. The applicant must generate this employment offer and provide sufficient documentary proof of it to Aztlan Immigration Services. The AIS will, of course, confirm all such documentation with the company involved. At the discretion of the AIS, required confirmation may include a notarized statement from an officer of the company that the job opening requires a skill-set unavailable within Aztlan—in other words, that no Aztlan citizens are adequately qualified to fill the position. (By Aztlan law, the officers of a company are personally liable for any illegal acts committed by that company, and so providing a fraudulent statement poses significant personal risk to the officer.)

>>>>>(Translation (I'm starting to feel like a set of subtitles ...): The guy who claims you're the only ped in the world who can fill the vacant position is on the legal hook if the Azzies find out otherwise. Serious comeback for the guy who's name is on the statement ... and you've got to take that fact into account when you're slipping a bribe or applying blackmail pressure. It's not only you who's up for the chop if things go drekky, it's him too.)<<<<<

— Miki (19:11:38/5-7-56)

Even with this documentation, the AIS has no obligation to explain or justify the rejection of an application. The company involved may appeal, but the process is complicated and often expensive. Record analysis indicates that appeals are highly unlikely to be granted in any case.

>>>>>(I can't think of many easier ways of getting on the Azzie government's drek-list than appealing some ruling. No farcing.)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (13:52:19/5-13-56)

It is important to note that an applicant is much less likely to be accepted for resident alien status if his or her potential employer has already attracted negative attention from the Aztlan government. Companies known to be connected with or to sympathize with strategically important UCAS concerns generally cannot bring in out-of-country workers. This prohibition greatly limits the utility of this channel for the insertion of covert assets.

Restrictions: Resident alien status is open-ended, as long as the holder is continuously employed by the same company. The laws state that the individual must be out of Aztlan by noon (Tenochtitlán time, Zone 6) on the day following that of employment termination. Even if the holder has an offer of employment from another registered company, he or she must reapply for resident alien status from outside Aztlan's borders.

As long as resident alien status lasts, however, the holder has most of the same rights as an Aztlan citizen. He or she may own land; may buy weapons, armor and cyberdecks (subject to applicable laws); and possess or acquire cyberware otherwise excluded by the provisions of the travel visa (subject to applicable law). The holder may not vote, however, nor may he or she run for public office.

>>>>>(Like you'd bother.)<<<<<

—Baz (15:47:42/5-6-56)

Resident aliens must register their official place of residence with the government, and update this contact information—including LTG and Matrix access nodes—whenever they move. Beyond this requirement, however, resident aliens may travel freely within Aztlan.

>>>>>(Okay, chummers, raise your hands. Who here actually lives at their "official place of residence" (assuming you've got one)? Well ... ? Come on now ... Yup, thought so. Precisely zero.)<<<<<

—Bung (13:10:56/5-8-56)

Citizenship

Acquiring Aztlan citizenship is not a viable alternative. Under Aztlan law, only the offspring of a registered citizen is eligible for citizenship, and then only if the birth is reported to the Registry of Births in Tenochtitlán (within the country) or to an Aztlan consulate (elsewhere in the world) within 90 days. If the birth is not recorded within this time frame, the child will never be eligible for citizenship.

>>>>>(Hey, there's other ways. Just ask the San Antonians. Arrange for the Azzies to invade your home. If you happen to be Chicano, they offer you citizenship. Null persp, right?)<<<<<

—Skrip (21:12:09/5-16-56)

The possibility remains of counterfeiting citizenship records, but this strategy is strongly contra-indicated. When returning to the country, all Aztlan citizens are subjected to fingerprint, voiceprint, retinal scan, and cellular print identification. So stringent is this check—and so confident are the Aztlan authorities of its effectiveness—that returning Aztlan citizens do not have to show passports, visas, or any form of identification. They simply state their citizenship, present their SINs, and undergo the iden-

tification scans. If the results match the records on file in the central Tenochtitlán data core within reasonable bounds—the subject is accepted as a citizen. Falsely claiming citizenship is a serious crime under Aztlan law.

>>>>>(And, since you're on Azzie turf when you're getting your body scanned, your hoop's in hot water ...)<<<<<
—Miki (12.29:04/5-8-56)

Independent analysis by the Data Processing Branch has evaluated the possibility of altering an existing citizenship record without detection at 7 percent ± 0.5 percent, and of inserting an entirely false record at 9 percent ± 0.5 percent. For this reason, it is strongly recommended that false citizenship be rejected as a viable option.

>>>>>(Wait a fragging tick here. 7 percent? 9 percent? What's the rating of those voice/retina/cell scanners anyway?)<<<<<
—Nova (00:21:13/5-10-56)

>>>>>(You don't get it, do you, slub? Probably they benchmark at Rating 7 or 8, but that's not the point, is it? Those scanners, they're all hooked up via the Matrix—or maybe even dedicated land-lines, I don't know—to the government's central data core. They look at your fingers, your eyes, your cells, then package all that data along with the SIN you gave the nice immigration goons and fire it off to the central computer with the question, "Do these match?" It's a simple database lookup. If you match what's in the cores, you're frosty. If not, you're dead.

It's not the scanners you've got to beat. It's the central Aztlan computer system. Do you want to try and slice into that kind of action? Not me, slub, I value my synapses too much.)<<<<<
—Miki (13:07:27/5-10-56)

>>>>>(If the ConsOps decker brigade don't figure they're up for shaving Azzie ice, that's good enough for me.)<<<<<
—Slinky (20 39:15/5-11-56)

>>>>>(You guys are puppies. I checked the datarags: the Aztlan RTG benchmarks out at something like Orange-3. Oooh, I'm real scared ...)<<<<<
—Tutu Tango (16:25:21/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Don't mean to drek on your parade, TT, but you gotta be a newbie, honto? Orange-3 ain't necessarily a cakewalk, depending on the ice involved. (You seen some of the low-load ice coming out of the code-slinger sweatshops these days?) Even if it is, that just means it's easier for you to sashay up to the SAN of the Aztlan central system ... which is where the real neuron-frying starts. The Aztlan government system and the Aztechnology corp system—as if there's really that much of a difference—are both ultrasecure systems. We're talking benchmarks up in the Red-7+ league. That should scare you, TT. Scares the drek out of me.)<<<<<
—Red Wraith (03:18:31/5-13-56)

>>>>>(In general, the Ghostly One is right. If you know where to look, you can find a couple of back doors ... but you can betcherass I'm not going to tell you where they are in case you leak it, and the Azzies slam one of those doors on my winkie.)<<<<<
—FastJack (02:13:38/5-15-56)

TRAVEL BY AIR

The following table lists the major airports within the Aztlan nation. For the purpose of this discussion, "major" means those airports that accept scheduled civilian international traffic. All of these airports can handle standard High Speed Civilian Transport (HSCT) traffic; only some have the longer runways required for suborbital and/or semiballistic service. Unscheduled flights can land at many of the minor, internal airports throughout the nation.

MAJOR AIRPORTS TABLE

City Traffic Accepted		
	Suborbital	Semiballistic
Acapulco	N	N
Austin	Y	N
Coban*	N	N
El Paso	N	N
Guadalajara	Y	N
Mazatlán	N	N
Mérida*	N	N
Monterrey	Y	Y
San Antonio	Y	Y
San Diego	Y	Y
Tenochtitlán	Y	Y
Tucson	N	N
Veracruz	Y	N

*Contested by Yucatán rebels.

>>>>>(Ah, "contested." Such a nice euphemism, isn't it? It means "no regular scheduled service, and a fragging good chance the rebels are going to flip a beam-rider, heat-seeker, or ARM at you if you try to land an unscheduled flight.")<<<<<
—Gamma (15:50:16/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Untrue. Aztlaner propaganda. Military flights and resupply missions are routinely engaged—with a high degree of success, I should add. Civilian traffic is not interdicted. Humanitarian efforts are actively encouraged.)<<<<<
—Matador (23.56:49/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Matador, you and your boyos should work on your fragging target identification. Your spokesman talking-heads claim you want "international understanding" of your plight and your struggle. How you going to get that if you hose off a Flecha SAM at every news chopper that comes to get the scoop, huh?)<<<<<
—Sky Eye (06:55:09/5-15-56)

>>>>>(A regrettable accident, which might not have occurred if the UCAS news media paid enough attention to situations beyond their borders to guess that an Aguilar helicopter—even an admittedly unarmed export version—might provoke an unwanted response.)<<<<<
—Matador (00:37:10/5-16-56)

>>>>>(Oops! Can we say, "Big fragging mistake"?)<<<<<
—Jaco (19:33:11/5-16-56)

>>>>>(???? Why the frag would a news-snoop be flying an Aguilar? That's still Aztechnology's primary attack bird, neh? Even the stripped-down export version has a gunship's profile—not what I'd call a good news-gathering platform. Sky Eye old chummer, I'd have flipped you a radar-guided greeting, too.)<<<<<
—Raiko (20:09:10/5-16-56)

>>>>>(If you ask me, Austin belongs in the "contested" category, too.)<<<<<
—Lewis (09 02:47/5-18-56)

Scheduled Flights

Both UCAS and CAS severely restrict air access to Aztlan. Global Airways, United, and PanGlobe offer regularly scheduled service from most UCAS/CAS hubs to Monterrey, Tenochtitlán ,and Veracruz. HSCT service arrives daily, with each carrier scheduling one suborbital flight per week to each destination in Aztlan. The relatively short distances involved make semiballistic travel impractical.

>>>>>(Whoa. No service into Austin or San Diego? What gives?)<<<<<
—Mungo Jerry (16:50:28/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Bad blood, basically. "You think we're going to pay landing fees to provide service to cities that used to be ours?" That kind of drek.)<<<<<
—Miki (13:04:14/5-14-56)

All the NAN nations except for Tsimshian schedule regular air service to and from Aztlan. Individual countries and different carriers service different Aztlan destinations. The vast majority of NAN couriers serve San Antonio, El Paso and the Aztlan sector of Austin. Only Screaming Eagle Airways (Pueblo) and Vegas Air (Ute) regularly service San Diego.

>>>>>(Wild guess: because it involves getting too close to CalFree airspace? Anyone check me on that?)<<<<<
—Fraser (11.58.21/5-8-56)

>>>>>(You got it. Things used to be better, but for reasons I don't understand, CalFree's air defense force has kicked up its level of vigilance (some would call it paranoia).)<<<<<
—Tonka (21:50:18/5-5-56)

>>>>>(It's not just the NAN carriers that keep their big birds away from San Diego these days, and for good reason. A semiballistic inbound to San Diego from Novograd almost ate a SAM couple years back. Seems CalFree's skytrack system had a software glitch and read the inbound semiballistic as an inbound ballistic missile. The way I hear it, the semiballistic track for a landing at San Diego is pretty close to what an ICBM strike on Los Angeles would follow, up to the point where it MIRVs. Generally, it don't pay to fly in airspace where the guys on the ground have good antiair capabilities and itchy trigger fingers.)<<<<<
—Arctic White (04:41:23/5-6-56)

The Front Range Free Zone represents a special case, as flight and schedule policies vary between FRFZ sectors and each governing nation. For example, all sectors, including UCAS and CAS, offer HSCT service from the Denver area to San Diego. However, service from the FRFZ to Aztlan—in fact, between the FRFZ and virtually any destination—is notoriously unreliable. Schedules may appear to be fixed and flights may appear to adhere closely to those schedules, but in practice the schedules are changed so frequently by government whim that it does not pay to count on them.

>>>>>(Case in point. Two years back, I got stranded in the Ute Zone (longest three weeks of my life!). For various and assorted very good reasons, I couldn't get out overland, and I didn't want to risk slipping the zones with some coyote who was more than likely to turn me in for the (large) bounty on my miserable hoop. I had the datawork for one (1) flight out of the Ute Zone, hopefully to some more hospitable clime (where there wasn't a price on my head). So of course, right then the Ute Zone government decided to cut off all air access between the Zone and everywhere else in the world except for the Ute Nation (not hospitable). Finally the Zone government changed its collective

mind and I could get the frag out of there, but it taught me a lesson. Don't depend on anything in the FRFZ!)<<<<<
—Lenox (10:38:15/5-10-56)

The Aztlan Sector within the FRFZ is an even more distinct subcase. Within the Aztlan Sector lies only one airport: Aeropuerto Montezuma, located on the site of the old Chamberlain Observatory. Because of space limitations, this facility cannot handle HSCTs, let alone anything larger. The vast majority of flights into and out of Aeropuerto Montezuma are Federated-Boeing Commuters and other similar V/STOL vehicles. The Montezuma field has limited usefulness; these carriers' relatively short range restricts traffic to a single "corridor" between the Aztlan Sector and El Paso. All civilian traffic into and out of the Aztlan Sector is conducted under the auspices of Air Montezuma, a subsidiary of Aztechnology. (Whether or not individual planes bear the livery of Air Montezuma, the airline controls all aspects of air travel.)

To some degree, flights between the Aztlan Sector and El Paso are considered "internal" or "domestic" flights. Therefore, the level of security involved in getting aboard one of these flights is considerably lower.

>>>>>(Lower than what? Lower than "bloody fragging obscene"? Okay, chummer, I'll grant you that one.)<<<<<
—Skyline (15:01:33/5-6-56)

>>>>>(The spook doesn't bother to point out that civilian flights from the Azzie Sector to El Paso are actually pretty rare. Sure, there's a lot of traffic flying that air corridor, and sure, a lot of it boasts the red-and-white livery of Air Montezuma. But it's still not what I'd call civilian. The vast majority of flights are actually corp flights, with all the security nastiness that normally entails. Aztechnology wants to fly some suit to Denver or back again, so it "requests" little-corp-brother Air Montezuma to supply the hardware. Scan the image?)<<<<<
—Symphony (07:34:56/5-8-56)

Air Montezuma and Aero Tierra (the Amazonian state carrier) both operate regularly scheduled service between Tenochtitlán and Caracas. Considering the state of tension between Aztlan and Amazonia, the security levels surrounding these flights are extreme, making this insertion channel virtually unusable.

>>>>>(Huh? And again, huh?)<<<<<
—Puma (13:33:12/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, I know what you're thinking. "Aztlan and Amazonia are at war ... which normally interrupts civilian air service between the combatants." Well, scope the real paydata. Aztlan and Amazonia—the countries, the sovereign states—are not at war. There's been no declaration of war between the two, no overt strikes by one government against the other's assets or territories. (Well, not in a while, at least.) Sure, it's an open secret that Amazonia's backing the Yucatán rebels—hey, a major player in the Amazonian government's even hanging in Yucatán these days—but neither government, for their own twisted reasons, is publicly acknowledging this. So you've got the whacked-out situation where two countries, for all practical purposes at war (albeit by proxy), are pretending to carry on normal relations. Welcome to the real (weird) world.)<<<<<
—Miki (23:23:15/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Anyone bother to ask how frequent those "regularly scheduled flights" actually are? Once every two weeks, chummers. Small planes, and they're almost always empty. Obviously, both governments are keeping up appearances, but not investing much money or skull-sweat in it.)<<<<<
—Jason (00:27:10/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Why bother at all? Because they're afraid the Corporate Court'll come and close down a "real" international scrap before it gets bad for general business?)<<<<<
—Tutu Tango (11:18:26/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Normally I'd agree with you, TT. After all, look what happened when Padua-Venice tried to invade Trieste; Saeder-Krupp and Fuchi closed that down right quick. This situation becomes a little more dicey, however, because one of the "governments" is essentially a triple-A megacorp with a seat on the Corporate Court.)<<<<<
—Doc (19:13:56/5-13-56)

The situation in the Caribbean League is so unstable on all fronts that by the time this report is reviewed, the situation may well have changed. As of this writing, Eastern Caribbean Air, IWIA (Independent West Indies Air), and Zion Air have reciprocal arrangements with Air Montezuma, allowing for flights between Aztlan hubs and Bridgetown, Nassau, and Kingston (respectively). Most of these flights connect with Tenochtitlán and Veracruz.

Security surrounding flights from the Carib League is extremely high. For this reason, these scheduled flights are contraindicated as insertion channels.

>>>>>(Zion Air ... ?)<<<<<
—Tobi (14:54:15/5-16-56)

>>>>>(Jamaican, natch.)<<<<<
—Miki (11:49:00/5-17-56)

Many national and private carriers offer service to Aztlan from Europe, Asia, and South America. Depending on the traffic requirements of the route involved, flights are scheduled daily (London to Tenochtitlán, British Airways) or weekly (Honolulu to San Diego, Air Montezuma).

Level of Security/Assets

Physical security surrounding Aztlan air terminuses, within the nation and in other countries, is comparable with that found

elsewhere. As discussed earlier, datawork undergoes intense scrutiny at both ends of all scheduled flights.

>>>>>(Oh yeah, there's something worth glossing: "both ends." Remember, that, chummers. Ever wonder why Aztlan sets up "reciprocal deals" with outfits like Zion Air and IWIA, rather than just opening up their hubs to anyone who wants to serve them? Here's why. Aztlan demands and gets "extraterritorial privileges" at the terminus where any Aztlan-bound flight departs.

Here's how it goes. Say you're flying in from London Heathrow to Tenochtitlán (I'm old enough that I still have trouble not calling it "Mexico City") on British Airways. You go through standard BA departure formalities, drink one last cup of tea, then head for the gate. The second you step into the holding pen—the waiting area around the gate—you're no longer on British turf. You're in Aztlan. If you're a law-abiding little drone, you probably won't notice the difference. If you're some hard-hooped shadowslag who's totally stoked over slipping your Slivergun past the BA security goons, you'll notice a big difference. Aztlan security (read Aztechnology security) can be more intrusive—damn near invasive, in fact—when it comes to scanning you for no-nos. And when they find your little ballistic friend—and trust me, find it they will—you're under Aztlan law, with all the consequences that entails. Nasty, huh?)<<<<<

—Argent (02:14:10/5-7-56)

Datawork inspection uses scanners that benchmark at Rating 7–8 (with the database look-up discussed under **Travel Visas**). The gate assembly through which debarking and embarking passengers must pass includes metal detectors and chem-sniffers, each of which typically benchmarks at Rating 8. If given reason to suspect the presence of illegal items, Aztlaner customs personnel will inspect individuals using hand-held scanners (typically Rating 5, but more effective because of their proximity) and may also conduct a physical search.

>>>>>(Pat-down, strip search, cavity search ... whatever they feel like.)<<<<<

—Argent (02:16:00/5-7-56)

The Aztlan security personnel on duty at every airport terminal always includes at least one magically adept officer who assenses passengers as they pass through. Elementals and/or spirits are often also "on call" to respond to any situations that arise

>>>>>(I saw one of those "situations" go down. I assensed the spirit that came when the security shaman squawked, and I've never seen anything like it before. Not your typical Hearth or City spirit, something very different. Anyone got the scan on this?)<<<<<

—Ling (10:11:18/5-20-56)

>>>>>(Go scan the section on things magical elsewhere in the file. You might find some clues there.)<<<<<

—Doc (14:14:37/5-22-56)

Physical and astral security around planes bound for Aztlan airspace are extreme. As part of the reciprocal arrangements Aztlan has struck with other nations, Aztlan forces are responsible for securing planes on the ground. Pointing to recent incidents of terrorist bombings and sabotage, these Aztlan forces reserve the right to use lethal force to protect the security of the planes and the passengers aboard.

Unscheduled Flights

Note: This discussion concerns overt channels. A discussion of covert air insertion appears later in this document.

The above sections refer to regularly scheduled civilian and commercial airline flights. Many unscheduled, yet still legitimate, civilian flights enter Aztlan on a regular basis, including corporate service and private flights in unregistered pleasure aircraft.

To be considered legitimate, all such flights landing on Aztlan soil—even if only for refueling or maintenance stops—must register a flight plan with the central air-traffic system computer. Most flight plans are filed via the Matrix, with the flight data transferred directly to the air-traffic control center in Tenochtitlán. This central system forwards the appropriate data to the actual destination of the noncommercial flight, and to associated interdiction assets along the flight path.

>>>>>("Associated interdiction assets"—bureaucratic-military doublespeak for airbases, interceptors and SAM sites. ATC Central in Tenochtitlán informs the appropriate air bases, etc. not to splash the incoming Gulfstream if it's filed an appropriate flight plan.)<<<<<

—Miki (14:01:50/5-7-56)

Acceptance or refusal of the flight plan is at the discretion of ATC Central in Tenochtitlán. ATC Central routinely refuses, delays, or redirects incoming noncommercial flights, not always for obvious reasons.

Officially speaking, noncommercial flights into disputed territory within the Yucatán must follow the same process. Under the current circumstances, it is unlikely that ATC Central will grant approval to any flight plan terminating in the Yucatán, except in the case of military or Aztechnology corporate operations.

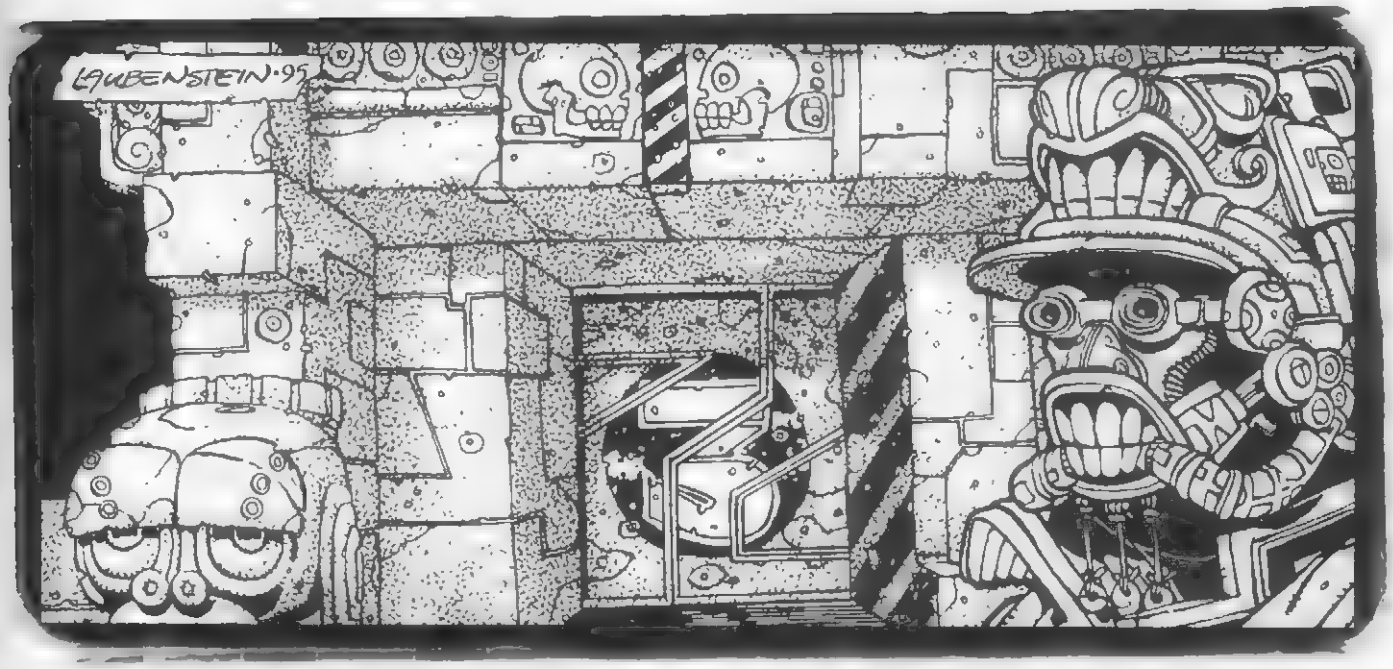
>>>>>(Something new the Azzies have been toying with is approving flight plans terminating in the Yucatán and then splashing the inbounds anyway.)<<<<<

—Symphony (02:16:37/5-18-56)

>>>>>(That's sheer bloody-mindedness on the part of the Azzies, if they're worried about letting in rebel resupply flights or the equivalent. Do they really think the rebels are going to file flight plans?)<<<<<

—Raiko (20.19:08/5-20-56)

Provisions exist for emergency situations. A plane suffering an in-flight emergency can request permission for an emergency



landing on Aztlan territory. The request can be made by broadcast or tight-beam radio, or via the Matrix if the plane has a satellite Matrix uplink, and should be directed to the civilian or military airport nearest the flight path. Most emergency requests are granted, but in almost all cases Aztlan military interceptors are scrambled to escort the "crippled" plane in for a landing. Military or Aztechnology corporate personnel are on the ground to "secure" the landing site. Declaring an in-flight emergency without cause is a serious crime, and charges of espionage often arise out of such fraudulent claims.

>>>>>(Remember, boys and girls of the shadows. Espionage in Aztlan, whether political, military, or corporate (not that there's much of a difference) can be treated as a geeking offense. Personally, I'd rather ditch a crippled plane when I didn't have the range to make it to my destination than go for an emergency bingo to Aztlan ... and then get my heart cut out as punishment for espionage.)<<<<<

—Rub (17:17:18/5-10-56)

TRAVEL BY LAND

All major and many minor land routes have border-crossing checkpoints through which one must pass to gain legal entry into Aztlan. To the south, the major land route into Aztlan is the Pan-American Highway, which enters the country 50 kilometers south of Cali in the former nation of Colombia. Another major entry point, from Amazonia, is the highway that passes from Mérida through El Vigía and into Aztlan near San Carlos.

>>>>>(Mérida? Thought that was a contested airport in the Yucatán.)<<<<<

—May (14:46:21/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Welcome to Central/South America, May. There's at least three places called "Mérida" in the neighborhood. The one we're talking about here is in Amazonia, in the Mérida province of what used to be Venezuela.)<<<<<

—Webster (19.02:06/5-14-56)

There are more usable routes from the north. Major border-crossings give access to San Diego via Highway 5 and Highway 15 from California Free State, to El Paso via Route 85 from Pueblo Corporate Council, to Big Spring via Texas Highway 87 from CAS, and to Matamoros via Texas Highway 77 from CAS. These border-crossing points are open around the clock, and accept and process unrestricted traffic. The many smaller border-crossing points have limited open hours and/or prohibit the passage of certain kinds of traffic, such as heavy commercial vehicles.

>>>>>(Yeah, okay, officially these borders are open around the clock, but I've found the Big Spring and Matamoros crossings all closed at one time or another without warning. Maybe the Azzies are just trying to yank the Texans' chain, I don't know.)<<<<<

—T-Bone (23:08.15/5-10-56)

Level of Security

In 2049, the Aztlan government "privatized" security at all border-crossing points, subcontracting the work out to Aztechnology. Guards and other personnel on duty at all such points are Aztechnology Corporate Security (ACS) personnel.

Anyone wishing to cross the border into Aztlan must provide authorizing datawork: travel visa, resident alien status card, or citizenship documentation. In most cases, ACS border agents examine the datawork at vehicle-side, using direct RF links between their headware and the computer system within the

er post. The agents have the right to require subjects to proceed into the border post for further scrutiny.

As with most border crossings, the border agents have the right to search inbound vehicles, their contents, and passengers to whatever extent they deem necessary. Border agent detachments always include magic-capable personnel detailed to assensing vehicles for stowaways. Note that the discovery of an area not amenable to astral examination will prompt a close physical inspection.

>>>>>(Translation (gawd, I'm getting tired of bureaucratese ...): There's ways to hide a stowaway from the prying astral eyes of an ACS shaman ... but as soon as that shaman spots the results of one of those ways, he'll call on his buddies to strip your vehicle down to the frame. It's up to you, by the by, to reassemble things afterward ... and if you take too long, you might get taken in for loitering or blocking access or some such drek.

And while I'm at it, the Azzies will sure as hell go over your vehicle with chemsniffers, looking for volatiles like propellant and explosives and for various restricted chemical compounds.)<<<<<

—Miki (19:14:18/5-7-56)

>>>>>(I know what some of you are thinking: what about the hard option? What about just blowing through, guns blazing? ConsOps isn't going to discuss this, it's just not their style.

So, can you do it? Yah, but you're going to get bloody. The buildings at border posts themselves are hardened like bunkers or blockhouses. You'll need a hardened-target-capable warhead to knock a hole in one—mil-spec all the way. Around the posts, the borders are lined with two reinforced fences. Gates in the two fences are offset, with concrete tank barriers that you've got to weave around—all to make sure you can't take a straight run-up at the gates. The fences aren't normally juiced, but they can be electrified with enough zazz to make a juggernaut twitch. Controls are in the blockhouse/building, and are not connected to the Matrix. (Sorry, deckers, one and all.)

A regular border detachment amounts to two squads of ACS hardmen. That's twelve Aztechnology soldiers, including two combat shamans (plus whatever little astral friends they happen to have hanging around). For important crossings, the detachment is beefed up to three or even four squads. There's usually no vehicular support onsite outside of a few drones, but there's a drekload on call. Typical response to an "incursion" is an Aguilar gunship or two on plus-five (the bad guys show up a mere five minutes after the call goes out), maybe a Halcón ground-support fighter on plus-ten, and whatever assets they need "downstream" to roadblock your course. And they know what your course is, because as soon as you blow through the border they'll pop a couple of Liebre drones to follow your every move.)<<<<<

—Argent (02:16:58/5-11-56)

TRAVEL BY SEA

No scheduled ocean travel debarks in Aztlan—the steamship routes crossing the Pacific or the Atlantic, the banana boats plying the Caribbean, have all vanished into history. People travel by sea to Aztlan on private craft, either owned or chartered.

By Aztlan law, to so much as enter Aztlan territorial waters (within 75 kilometers of the coastline) an individual must have appropriate documentation: travel visa, resident alien status, or full Aztlan citizenship. Upon arrival in Aztlan proper, everyone aboard a vessel must report to the local authorities, present personal documentation, and submit to a customs inspection. As with land border posts, this inspection can be extreme; Aztlan authorities have been known to strip pleasure ships to the keel, though nondestructive methods of examination such as ultrasound, MNR and astral scanning are more common.

ANALYSIS

Much has been said in this report and elsewhere implying that the borders of Aztlan are sacrosanct. Not so. It is relatively easy to enter Aztlan through overt or standard channels, as long as various conditions are met:

- Legitimate (or suitably well forged) datawork;
- No restricted equipment (most importantly, firearms/explosives, cyberdecks, and cyberware);
- Willingness to abide by legal restrictions on movement once within the country (or to accept the consequences).

It is up to the Operations Department to determine whether these conditions are acceptable for Consular Operations assets inserted into Aztlan.

>>>>>(Translation (again): You can get into the country legally. It's a hassle, and you can't bring much in the way of toys with you, but you can do it. It's up to y'all to decide if you can live with that and pick up your bang-bangs once you're on Azzie turf, or if you prefer the bigger risks and bigger rewards of slipping the border illegally.)<<<<<

—Miki (19:10:15/5-7-56)

EXTRAORDINARY CHANNELS

This section discusses covert insertion without the benefit of official or fraudulent datawork. In general, the benefits are the lack of restrictions on personnel and equipment (except those enforced by the physical requirements of insertion). The major disadvantages are the higher risk of mission failure and the consequences arising from capture.

>>>>>(Translation: if your spook blows it when he's slipping the border, the Azzies will bag him and wring him out. And what he tells them, either under drugs or in terminal anguish, might be something of an inconvenience.)<<<<<

—Miki (19:15:23/5-7-56)

AIR INSERTION

Cargo Routes: As with most nations, the vast majority of air cargo is shipped into Aztlan via SHAPELY airships, mainly the

world-standard long-haul LZ-2051-C. Though it is remarkably easy to stow away on such a vessel, exiting undetected at the destination poses some problems. Aztlan security protocols ensure that a trained combat mage or shaman is present to astrally inspect all incoming shipments for stowaways. The slow speed of airship travel may also cause problems, as a stowaway must provide his own life support during the journey.

>>>>>(You're telling me there's a fragging spellworm giving the astral look-see to every fragging shipment that comes into the fragging country? Pull the other one.)<<<<<

—Bonzo Dog (10:28:08/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Anywhere else, Bonz old chummer, I'd share your skepticism. But this is Aztlan/Aztechnology. They don't cut no corners on this magic drek, and they have a high enough percentage of mages on the payroll to cover the bases.)<<<<<

—Akula (18:20:59/5-11-56)

Covert insertion via higher-speed cargo flights is strongly contra-indicated. In all cases, shipping manifests record the mass of cargoes to such exact tolerances that a stowaway cannot avoid detection.

>>>>>(So fix the fragging manifests! Do I have to do all your thinking for you?)<<<<<

—Piers (03:21:19/5-23-56)

Direct Insertion: Aztlan has better radar coverage of its airspace than any other nation, including the UCAS. Phased-array radar emplacements located at the military bases of Ensenada, Nogales, San Angelo, Ciudad Victoria, Villahermosa, Progreso, Tapachula, and Colima cover all air approaches from an altitude of 50 meters AGL to approximately 25,000 meters (82,000 feet). Below 50 meters AGL, ground clutter minimizes the chance of detection by the phased-array systems. However, local air-defense radars operated by individual military units, as well as the air traffic control grid, may detect flights below this level. Surveillance drones and aircraft equipped with look-down radar patrol the more sensitive parts of the border.

>>>>>(That AGL acronym keeps coming up. What the frag is it?)<<<<<

—Neumann (23:01:24/5-15-56)

>>>>>("Above Ground Level," as opposed to "above sea level.")<<<<<

—Arctic White (02.48.34/5-16-56)

A high-altitude antiballistic missile radar net covers Aztlan airspace from an altitude of 30,000 meters (98,000 feet) out to low earth orbit. Theoretically, a high-altitude aircraft could penetrate Aztlan airspace through the potential "seam" in radar coverage between 25,000 and 30,000 meters, allowing for a HALO (High Altitude Low Opening) parachute drop. The difficulty lies in camouflaging the operative so inserted to avoid radar detection, both during the free-fall phase and after chute deployment.

>>>>>(These guys are fragging cracked. A HALO from 27,000 meters? First off, not much can even reach that altitude. That's why the phased-array radar coverage cuts off at 25k meters—there's little point in extending it. Second, do you have any fragging idea what kind of scatter you're going to get during the drop? Chummer, you'll be lucky to hit the right fragging country.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (02:51:23/5-16-56)

>>>>>(Okay, Whitey, give. How would you do it, then, huh? Inquiring minds want to know.)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (21:20:01/5-16-56)

>>>>>(Here's how I think I'd run it. Come in hot and low, cutting the daisies in a signature-reduced, twin-engine bird. Keep my fingers crossed that I can keep below the phased-array coverage and avoid blazing right over some antiair unit on maneuvers. Having already programmed the bird's autopilot with a special maneuver, I set course for open territory where nobody but fragging lizards are going to see my chute—the badlands around Guaymas, maybe.

At the right spot, I pull up to safe bail-out altitude and punch out. At bail-out altitude, the bird's already a blip on the phased array, so I've got to distract the Azzies from looking for me. Here's where the special maneuver I programmed into the autopilot kicks in.

A second or two after I'm out of the bird (and be warned, I haven't figured out the exact timing here), the autopilot firewalls the throttle on one of the engines and overdrives the impeller. I've weakened the impeller blades just enough beforehand so that the whole thing comes apart. Spectacular pyrotechnics show as one engine tears itself to shreds. Sure as hell, this'll show up on the Azzie screens ... and hopefully they'll think any glimpse they caught of me separating from the bird was actually part of the "catastrophic engine failure." I look to them like just another chunk of shrapnel that a moment ago used to be engine. Still on auto, the bird keeps climbing, kicks the remaining engine into burner, and starts running for safety at high speed. I might program the transponder to squawk mayday as well, just for good measure. If the Azzies run true to form, they'll blow the crippled bird out of the air with a SAM. End of "intrusion threat" as far as the Azzies are concerned. As far as I'm concerned, the Azzies have just incinerated any evidence of my attempt to penetrate their turf.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (03:04:56/5-18-56)

>>>>>(Whitey, you're a twisted fragging bastard. I love it!)<<<<<

—Fritz the Rat (20:58:33/5-18-56)

>>>>>(Check me if I'm wrong, but one of the phased-array sites—Progreso—is in the Yucatán. Contested territory, neh? (Frag, if I were the rebels I'd have blown that fragging radar site

>>>>>(Comes from having t-birds running over them alla time, huh?)<<<<<
—Becka (10:44:11/5-8-56)

The fence is usually patrolled by so-called maintenance units, light mechanized infantry units with a detachment of combat engineers. Other patrol assets vary depending on the location and level of border sensitivity.

Along the entire length of Aztlan's northern border, with the sole exception of the region around San Diego, the Aztlan government and those of its neighbors have agreed to a so-called buffer zone, a demilitarized zone straddling the border. The width of this border varies, depending on terrain and population density, but it is never less than 2,000 meters wide (1,000 meters on each side of the nominal border). In the middle of west Texas, the buffer zone is 8,000 meters wide (4,000 meters on each side of the nominal border). Officially, no military assets may be deployed within the buffer zone. The incursion of any military unit into that zone may, at the other country's discretion, be taken as an act of war.

on day one.) Makes for one big gaping hole in radar coverage, neh?)<<<<<
—Tobiko (20:28:17/5-21-56)

>>>>>(True enough, but betcha both sides are making up for that with local assets, those antiair units Arctic White mentioned, lots of them. When a SAM blows you out of the air, it doesn't much matter whether a strategic phased array system or a mobile radar truck vectored the missile to its target. Dead is dead.)<<<<<
—Argent (00:57:28/5-22-56)

CROSS-COUNTRY INSERTION

The land borders of Aztlan are too long to be completely secured. The following section describes options for covert insertion via Aztlan's northern and southern borders.

Northern Border [CAS/Pueblo/CalFree]

Most of the northern border is lined with fences whose security is supported by sensor arrays of various kinds: pressure pads, antipersonnel radar, listening posts, and simple contact sensors on the fence. Near population centers and major traffic routes, the fences and sensor nets are kept in good repair. Elsewhere, however—in the middle of the west Texas desert, for example—the fence line is poorly maintained and occasionally even nonexistent.

>>>>>(The buffer zone isn't exactly the "tripwire for war" that the spook implies. Nobody wants a full-scale shooting war, much too messy. People on both sides of the border run military units into the buffer zone pretty regularly, always for "good reasons" (usually chasing some smuggler in a t-bird, come to think of it). Instead of immediately gearing up for war, the country across the border usually sends in its own forces to scare off the bad guys. Typical scenario: the Azzies are in hot pursuit of a t-bird that ducks into the buffer zone, making tracks for CAS turf. The Azzies follow the jammer into their own half of the zone. CAS responds, maybe scrambling a couple of Phantom IVs from the Texas Air National Guard base in Abilene into the buffer zone. The Phantoms light off their fire-control radars—but they don't fire, and they stay carefully in the CAS half of the zone. The Azzies break off contact and head for home, the Phantoms bingo for Abilene, honor is satisfied, and everything settles back down. It's like a big threat display.

The drek doesn't really drop into the pot until military forces actually crack the border—Azzie units into the CAS part of the buffer zone, or vice versa. Hasn't happened yet.)<<<<<
—Honcho (13:52:23/5-10-56)

Highly "sensitive" border stretches include the California Free State border, much of the Pueblo border, and the regions of the CAS border nearest to Austin and El Paso. Along these lines, heavy Aztlan military forces are "dug in" and ready to counter armed incursions from across the border. According to the

Aztlan military's operational doctrine, heavy armor is assigned to Operational Maneuver Groups, while lighter armor and mechanized infantry are spread out as a defensive "trip wire." The Aztlan military tends to keep its air assets well back from the front lines but close enough to respond quickly; expect primary response in plus-five, heavy response in plus-thirty.

>>>>>(Guess the Azzies would rather take casualties on the front line than risk losing their precious air assets to infiltration/saboteur units. Still, plus-five/plus-thirty—that means first birds on station five minutes after the balloon goes up, full engagement within another 25 minutes—is pretty fragging good. I wouldn't want to be commanding the pathfinder units in any assault against these slots.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (02:57:35/5-16-56)

Along the highly sensitive border areas, Aztlan forces serve as advance warning for military probes across the border. Sensor nets are therefore less effective at detecting individuals, or even small reduced-signature vehicles. However, the relatively low detection risk is offset by the near-certainty of mission termination upon detection.

>>>>>(Man, he's back into bureaucratese mode again ... Translation: You can slip through the border with a good chance of never seeing a single Azzie. But if you meet any opposition at all, it's probably going to be a whole fragging light armor division. Good-bye charlie.)<<<<<

—Miki (19:22:39/5-7-56)

>>>>>(To give you an idea of what the Azzies are worried about along these stretches of border, the "upgunned" Texas Rangers have two heavy armored divisions tricked out with Main battle tanks and all the trimmings dug in along the border around Austin. (Austin is officially demilitarized, but try telling that to the "civilian security consultants" glaring at each other over gunsights from both sides of the border. Shades of Denver.) And CAS has another division held in "strategic reserve" at Waco. Be afraid.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (03 00:22/5-16-56)

Along the less sensitive stretches of the border, security focuses not on full-scale troop movements, but on small-scale border incursions such as smuggling missions and the like. Official operating procedure in these areas is based on swift movement and rapid response, and the forces involved reflect this emphasis. Instead of full military assets, these areas are patrolled by paramilitary security personnel. In an emergency, border security can call on full military support, but their on-site resources are much less impressive.

>>>>>(In comparison to an armored division, maybe. In comparison to your typical shadowrunner, the ACS patrols around here are loaded for fragging bear.)<<<<<

—Dave Lid (12:12:09/5-13-56)

Sensor suites and listening posts tend to be more sensitive to individual signature-reduced vehicles. The absence of large troop concentrations on the Aztlan side of the border, and thus the absence of large "background" signals, makes this extra sensitivity feasible.

Aztlan patrols its side of the buffer zone with a wide variety of vehicles: Sikorsky-Bell "Red Ranger" Scout ACVs, Ferrari "Appaloosa" Light Scout Vehicles, LAV-103 "Striker" Light Tanks, and even GMC Banshee LAVs. Air support is provided by Yellowjacket and Wasp small rotorcraft, and by the pervasive Aguilar helicopter gunship. In extreme circumstances, Halcón ground-attack aircraft can be called up for support.

The chance of detection for individuals or single vehicles in these "low-sensitivity" border areas are actually higher than in the high-sensitivity regions. However, the chances of surviving detection by breaking contact or even destroying the opposition are higher.

>>>>>(Oooh, spook-boy's been eating raw meat. "Destroying the opposition"—what a fresh idea!)<<<<<

—Bung (10:25:59/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Okay, jokers, here's the scan. You want to do the Azzie border, keep it small. Speed's good, but stealth's better. I know some of you out there love to run the line in Banshees and other LAVs. Well, good luck, and better you than me. A t-bird's got speed, sensors, and it can bloody the nose of anyone who comes looking for it, but it's also big, hot, and noisy. Strike three, in my book.

Me, I like Red Rangers running on their ground wheels. Don't know about your models, but mine with the ground wheels engaged has a nominal signature of around 8. I call that nice and stealthy. If I get caught I'll get hurt, but I'm much less likely to get caught in the first place than you t-bird jammers. Honto?

Turf the Ranger's armaments (because they're not going to help worth squat anyway) and replace them with all the ECM you can afford. Mount flare dispensers, chaff rockets, and smoke generators. You probably won't use those last; they're just a bonus if some Azzie unit locks you up at extreme range. Punch the countermeasures, break lock, and slide out of there.

And that's it. If you've got the contacts, get a read on where the Azzie listening posts happen to be today. And then go in slow and stealthy.)<<<<<

—Ranger Red (20:43:27/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Buildrek! A Red Ranger? Red Rangers are fragging popcorn. Gimme my Banshee, the Glamorous Glynnis. Gimme my hardened armor, a full sensor suite, and my rotary autocannon. I'll dance on your grave, RR.)<<<<<

—Bannon (05:26:03/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Gotta go with Ranger Red on this one. Your best bet's not being spotted in the first place. The Azzies have got their combined-arms tactics down pat, and chummer, they're a bear. Leapfrogging ground units to keep you on the run so you can't

just go hull-down and wait it out. Air support to keep you eyeballed. Drones on your hoop—including those Liebre things they've got, acting as target designators for missile platforms that don't have direct lock on you (And yes, they can do that.) Azzie mil-spec LAVs inbound, and—just to make your day complete—a couple of Halcón tank-busters inbound at plus-five to finish things off. It's possible to make and then break contact, but mondo better never to make contact at all, neh?)<<<<<

—Arctic White (03:08:31/5-16-56)

Southern Border (Amazonia)

Along the southern border, the tactical situation is very different. The terrain is much more restrictive—rugged mountains and deep valleys, most of them blanketed with heavy forest. In very few places, exclusively near concentrated populations, is the border marked in any way. Elsewhere, particularly to the southeast, Aztlan has tried to mark and secure the border by clearing forest and laying fences. However, because the magic that has so quickly reforested Amazonia causes the jungle to encroach on these cleared areas at an astonishing rate, Aztlan seems to have given up this practice.

Security along the southern border is much more difficult to maintain than in the north, for several reasons. The jungles and forested mountains are alive with indigenous creatures that constantly trigger motion, sound, and pressure sensors. In many areas, the thick flora reduces visibility to below ten meters, degrading the effectiveness of patrols. Finally, the prevalence of dual-natured creatures with a presence on the mundane and astral planes minimizes the utility of summoned arcane guardians.

>>>>>(I must translate this one. Our good spook means that there are so many astral traces from Awakened beasties that simple constructs like watchers get confused. More competent and more "expensive" (in a magical sense) spirits and elementals might well be stalked by Awakened dual predators defending their "turf" from interlopers.)<<<<<

—Neddy (09.58:31/5-7-56)

>>>>>(So am I right in assuming some of those predators might get nasty ideas about me, say, if I tried to slip over the border?)<<<<<

—Road Fever (17:51:02/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Yes.)<<<<<

—Neddy (09:36:05/5-8-56)

>>>>>(<sigh> Thought so.)<<<<<

—Road Fever (18:00.28/5-8-56)

Closed-terrain guerrilla-style tactics are the only practical choice, both for security personnel at the border and for operatives attempting to penetrate that security. For a ConsOps insertion mission, the situation is further complicated by the presence in the area of indigenous paranatural fauna and Amazonian guerrilla forces, many of them magically active.

>>>>>(Ah, frag me, the Amazonian jungle. Been there, done that, and once is more than enough. Can't see more than four meters in front of your nose. Arms exhausted from swinging a machete. The trail you've cut seeming to close behind you, the plants growing so fragging fast. And no way of knowing if that persistent faint sound you hear behind you is an Azzie jungle-warfare squad, an Amazonian infiltration team, or a fragging Awakened jaguar looking for lunch. You're fragging welcome to it.)<<<<<

—Lucinus (24:15:32/5-24-56)

:::::[HECATE] What is an "Awakened jaguar"??

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] That would be me.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] <chuckle>

:::::[UMSONDO] And he is hardly alone.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ah, our leonine friends. Perhaps I should take a closer interest in such matters.

:::::[UMSONDO] Perhaps you should.

SEA INSERTION

Feasible methods of insertion by sea include travel by cruise or cargo ship, as well as direct insertion.

Cruise Ships

The very existence of the Caribbean League as a distinct entity, and the uncertain economic and other conditions created by the Yucatán rebellion, have drastically decreased the volume of sea traffic to Aztlan's eastern coastline. Cruise ships, however, still put in at several ports of call along the eastern seaboard. Cruise-ship traffic also remains moderately high along the western coastline. Typical ports of call are Ciudad Madero and Veracruz to the east, and Ensenada, Cabo San Lucas, Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta, and Acapulco to the west.

Security surrounding cruise tourists debarking for a day ashore is stringent, but polite. For cruise-line employees granted shore leave, security is just as stringent but generally far from polite. In theory, a ConsOps agent posing as a tourist or cruise-line employee can escape security at the time of debarkation, but his "disappearance" will be noted when the passenger and crew lists undergo the routine check before the ship sets sail. A security clampdown, most likely under the cover of a "missing persons investigation," will likely interfere with the asset's mission, and so this insertion channel is contra-indicated.

>>>>>(Assuming you're on the passenger/crew list in the first place ...)<<<<<

—Jim-Lad (19:18.32/5-21-56)

Cargo Routes

Aztlan has five major cargo seaports: Tampico, Limón (in the former nation of Costa Rica), and Cartagena (in the former nation of Colombia) on the west coast and Acapulco and Ciudad Obregón on the east. Though it is much easier to stow away aboard a cargo ship than aboard a cargo aircraft, the security around the docks is considerable. Mages and/or shamans make random astral scans of all off loaded cargo, making it difficult for a stowaway to avoid detection.

>>>>>(Chummskis, you want to get something into any country with a seaport, even Aztlan, I can do it for you. Chips, telesma, tech, arms, don't matter what kinda cargo we're talkin'. People are just another kind of cargo. You want the best, come to the source. Relay at NA/CAS-GU 1713 (06-0923).)<<<<<

—Wharf Rat (06:37:10/5-23-56)

>>>>>(Warning. You want to get killed, there's cheaper ways to arrange it than hooking up with the Yarf Rat. (Frag, I'll do it for the cost of ammo expended plus enough change for a beer after you're meat.))<<<<<

—Homer (09:02:27/5-23-56)

Direct Insertion

Aztlan goes to great lengths to protect its coasts from smugglers and illegal aliens. Patrol boats monitor the nation's territorial waters, supported by aircraft and passive monitoring systems. Radar sweeps obvious approach routes. The level of enforcement is extremely high in comparison to other countries throughout the world. However, Aztlan has too many thousands of kilometers of coastline for any force to adequately guard. Therefore, the chance of detection during an attempted insertion by sea is relatively low.

The consequences of detection, however, are extremely negative. Independent analysis puts the odds of successful insertion at 72 percent, assuming a low-signature one-man vessel, night operation, and favorable weather. Computer models predict that a diversion to distract naval forces may increase the odds of success to 79 percent, but the consequent increase in vigilance of land-based forces may negate this advantage. Unfortunately, the assumptions used in this model negate any significant chances of escape (or survival) should the insertion be detected in progress.

>>>>>(Man, I did it this way once. Never again. Scary drek, let me tell you

I came in from the west. Mothership (a big ocean-going trimaran) 80 klicks offshore of Acapulco, running with the wind southeast. Moonless night, drekky weather. Over the rail I go in my one-man zodiac. No metal equipment, to minimize my radar signature. Even the outboard's a ceramic-composite job. (Which means no guns. Even my knife's a ceramic laminate.) I cruise in at 20 knots ... so it takes me four fragging hours to make landfall.

And every second of those four hours, I'm listening for engines. Aero engines—drones or long-loiter fixed-wings or (god help me) attack choppers. Marine engines—Nightrunners. Vector thrust—a naval LAV scrambled to sink my mothership because it drifted too close to Aztlan waters. I want to crack the throttle so bad, just to get it over with. But I know the Azzies have listening posts, sonar "picket lines" up and down the coast. Got to keep my speed down or I'm one dead spook.

Man, I think I aged ten years in those four hours. Never again.)<<<<<

—Gale Force (20:19:14/5-23-56)

INSERTION VIA THE YUCATÁN

The situation in the Yucatán is sufficiently volatile that this area warrants an independent report and analysis. The two options open to Consular Operations are enlisting rebel cooperation or attempting covert air or sea insertion.

Rebel Cooperation

Depending on the mission, it may be possible to recruit cooperation from the rebel forces. The rebels have already solved many of the problems of reaching Aztlan territory for their own resupply and reinforcement missions. Though still small and relatively infrequent, these operations consistently manage to penetrate Aztlan's security.

Rebel resupply occurs by sea and sometimes by air. Some of this resupply comes directly from Amazonian territory—specifically, from the port of Puerto Cumarebo on the north coast of the former nation of Venezuela. Most supplies, however, are transferred through various ports within the Caribbean League—specifically, sites in Jamaica, the Grand Caymans, and Cuba.

>>>>>(No wonder the Azzies and the Carib League don't get on too good these days.)<<<<<
—Bridget (20:28:19/5-12-56)

Various concerns, discussed above, limit Aztlan's freedom and willingness to engage "the enemy" beyond Aztlan's territorial limits. Therefore, they have so far made no direct strikes against Amazonian territory or national assets, nor have they launched interdiction missions into international waters.

>>>>>(I'm real surprised the Azzies haven't accidentally launched a cruise missile at the Caymans. Claim it was an unrepeatable accident, cashier the poor slag "responsible," and kowtow to the Corporate Court. Pay damages. You can bet your hoop the message'd come through loud and clear, and the rest of the Carib League would be less willing to act as staging area for Amazonian personnel and materiel.)<<<<<
—Bomber Harris (02:16:39/5-26-56)

>>>>>(Um, Bomber? This is the Carib League we're talking about. The Corp Court doesn't have much influence there ...)<<<<<
—Toad (10:28:11/5-30-56)

Rebel forces are able to project sufficient force to screen and even actively defend resupply missions to the Yucatán. Losses among these missions are steady, but so far acceptably low. If the goals of a specific ConsOps mission align with the goals of the rebels, it should be possible to arrange for ConsOps assets to travel to the Yucatán via rebel resupply channels.

>>>>>(Same with shadowrunners, neh? Should be easy if you're taking a run against Aztechnology. Shouldn't have much grief getting the rebels onside with that one.)<<<<<
—Dobu (01:15:39/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, but Spook-boy doesn't point out that the "asset" still has to ghost his way through "contested territory" into Aztlan proper. Easier said than done.)<<<<<
—Miki (08:28:00/5-8-56)

"False Flag" Cooperation: If mission goals seem unlikely to elicit cooperation from the rebels, it may be feasible to delude the rebel forces as to the ConsOps mission's true purpose. For example, the ConsOps agent may be tagged as a military advisor, sent to assist the rebels in some upcoming operation. In this case, the agent must separate from the rebel forces to conduct his own mission as soon as possible after entering the Yucatán.

>>>>>(Ditto here. "Yeah, General Reb, I'm looking to shave Aztechnology ice." As soon as you're in-country, pull the quick fade.)<<<<<
—Dobu (01:18:01/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Could work. Once.)<<<<<
—Miki (08:29:26/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Don't play "false flag" games. They work on occasion, but invite the worst kinds of retribution.)<<<<<
—Matador (02:28:19/5-10-56)

Covert Air/Sea Insertion

Covert approaches to the Yucatán must deal with two distinct detection and interdiction forces: the Aztlaner network described earlier in this report, and that of the rebels. On the average, the level of granulation within the rebel forces is much higher than for the Aztlaner network, but within key spheres of influence detection and interdiction resources are also considerably greater because the rebel forces are largely made up of mobile installations.

>>>>>("Granulation"? We talking sugar here?)<<<<<
—Raver (06:29:16/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Military techno-speak again. "Granulation" means the rebel detection net has strong areas and weak areas, unlike the Aztlan system (which stays constant around the nation's perimeter, apart from the Yucatán). In some places the rebels have a tighter detection net than the Azzies; in other places it's like a sieve. Got it?)<<<<<
—Arctic White (19:20:35/5-11-56)

The potential for sowing confusion between the two detection networks is significant. For example, the rebels might interpret an insertion as a radar echo from a resupply mission, while the Aztlan forces might interpret such an operation as an artifact of their own patrols. In either case, the insertion is likely to succeed unmolested.

>>>>>(Oh, yeah, and I believe in the Easter fragging Bunny. A old-timer called Murphy's got something to say about that. It's more likely the rebels will take you for an Azzie patrol, and the Azzies'll think you're a rebel reinforcement mission. Either way, twice as many radar-homing missiles will head straight for you. Boom, boom.)<<<<<
—Lincoln (05.48.51/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Comes down to personal taste, then, don't it? Whether you're down for rolling the dice. Good if you win, bad if you lose.)<<<<<
—Dogbreath (11:47:30/5-15-56)

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION

The utility of the Yucatán route depends in great measure on whether the ConsOps mission fits with the goals of the Yucatán rebels or can be made to appear so. Analysis implies that the chance of successfully inserting a ConsOps agent via established rebel resupply/reinforcement routes is 81 ± 3 percent. The success rate of covert insertion without rebel cooperation drops to 47 ± 3 percent (sea) and 39 ± 3 percent (air). It is impossible to estimate the success rate of a false-flag procedure.

>>>>>(Chummlichen, take these figures with one mondo grain of salt, neh? ConsOps hasn't tried these techniques (I don't think). They're basing them on computer models. And you know about the four kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, statistics, and computer models)<<<<<

—Fafner (00:13:30/5-9-56)

>>>>>(ConsOps slags are fraggin' puppies, man! No way there's a worse-than-even chance of making it into Yucatán without anyone tagging you. No way.)<<<<<

—Darren B. (12:56:25/5-11-56)

>>>>>(One thing they ain't is puppies, priyatel, trust me on that one. Not the line animals—the guys out on the pointy end who actually do this drek. But I agree with you on the odds. My guess is, the analysts are the puppies.)<<<<<

-Argent (09:02:01/5-13-56)

As for other potential insertion points, rigorous analysis points to the following techniques as the most attractive for covert action. The success of a conventional insertion via legal channels is virtually certain, but its utility is doubtful.

- Land insertion (Aztlan/Pueblo border): 69 ± 3 percent
- Land insertion (Amazonia border): 52 ± 3 percent
- Sea insertion (Sea of Cortez coast): 51 ± 4 percent
- Air insertion (HALO drop): 32 ± 7 percent

>>>>>(The analysts puppy out again, in my opinion. Bump all the figures up by 10 percent, maybe—more, if you're drek-hot)<<<<<

—Argent (09:10:57/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Except the figure on the HALO drop. I'd like to see the computer model they used for that one. Probably neglected to include high-altitude winds, or some drek.)<<<<<

—Arctic White (03:14:36/5-16-56)

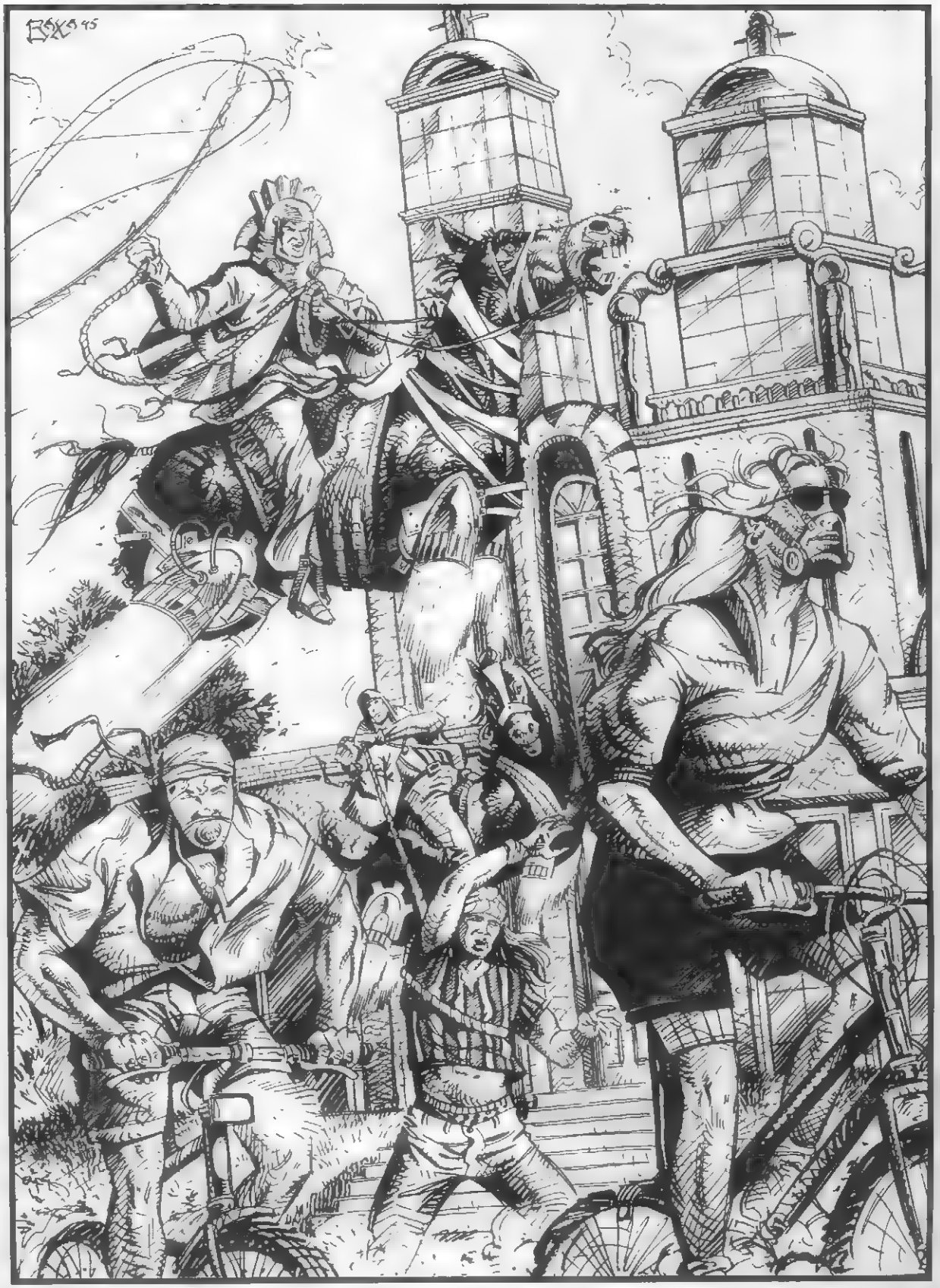
:::::**[JUNGLE CAT] The presence of this kind of information here disturbs me.**

:::::**[WORDSMYTH] You get used to it, and invest more money in computer security.**

LIVING IN AZTLAN

>>>>>(This file'll tell you what you need to know about the nuts and bolts of surviving and doing biz in Aztlan. Some of it came from Espectro, but I also called in a few favors from the folks at Shadowland and asked them to fill in the gaps. To kick the whole thing off, I've asked one of your peers—an old chummer-runner of mine, goes by the name Flipside—to describe what it's like to actually live in Aztlan. I know you'll be interested in her take on the current sit)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:12.10/5-1-56)



LIFE ON THE STREETS

So you're thinking about taking a jaunt south of the border and you want to know what the streets are like down there, huh? Let me share with you my bounty of experience <grin>. Overall take on Aztlan: it's a great place to visit, but I wouldn't want to die there.

CORPORATORS

Chummers, in Aztlan the corporators live the life of Riley. Believe it. The center of Tenochtitlán is a corp enclave, and it's a frag of a nice place to spend some time ... if you belong there, needless to say. Most of the suits live in the same kind of urban complexes you see in downtown Seattle. Not quite arcologies, but pretty close. (There's only one arcology worthy of the name—the Aztechnology pyramid, right on Paseo de la Reforma, about two klicks from the old National Palace.) They ain't fully self-sufficient, but not far from it.

If you live in one of these complexes—the locals call them *castillos* or *alcázars* ("castles")—you pretty near never have to leave. Which is fragging lucky for you, considering what the streets are like. You think Seattle's bad, with constant rain so acidic that it stings your eyes when it falls, where all the buildings are turning gray from the smog, and the plascrete is dissolving by microcentimeters because of the drek that's always dripping on it? Chummer, compared to Tenochtitlán, Seattle's the Garden of drekking Eden. Everyone here wears a breather whenever they have to step outside, even if it's only for 30 seconds. Everyone. They wear their filter masks so often, they make them part of each day's outfit. And I'm not talking pseudo-designer Fellini med-breathers here—I'm talking intricate, personalized decoration. Paint, enamel, dainty filigree work, beads and sequins, semiprecious and even precious gemstones on occasion. They'd be gorgeous to look at, if you could forget why people have to wear them. I once saw a baby wearing one—its mother had trimmed the thing with lace and little silk rosebuds to go with the little darling's bonnet and bunting. Somebody probably gave it to her as a shower gift. Made me want to cry.

Anyway, almost everything you might need or want is inside the *castillo*: restaurants, medical centers, daycare zoos for the rug rats, theaters (live *and* simsense or trideo), fitness clubs, bars ... even "comfort stations" to ease the biological back-pressure of all genders. If you're a resident of a *castillo*, you don't have to pay for anything directly. You don't even slot a stick to buy dinner. You just thumbprint a scanner and everything gets charged to your residential account (which is usually linked directly to the same cred account that receives your corporate salary). In most of these places, if you don't live there, you can't pay for *nothing*. If you ain't a guest of a resident, you ain't getting in. Convenient if you belong, a real pain in the hoop if you don't.

There's a rigid hierarchy, both between *castillos* and inside them. If you're a real high-tone suit, you get to hang in the nicer places. If you're only a middle manager, you get to play at correspondingly less flash facilities. And if you're a low-level data-pusher, the only restaurants you get to visit are about the same quality as McHugh's.

Aztlan seems to be much more into telepresence than Seattle-based corps (within the *castillos*, at least). A whole drek-load of corporators—call it 75 percent, maybe more—work from home, "dialing in" their work via dedicated datalinks. Convenient for everyone, *neh?* You don't have to commute. You roll out of bed come the morning and jack into the computer system installed in your apartment. Thanks to the wonders of simsense, you're instantly "at work." Great for the wageslaves who don't have to fight traffic. And great for the corps, 'cause everyone who telecommutes is on call around the clock!

>>>>>(Hmm. Interesting. Means I can penetrate a corp not by cracking into that corp's facilities, but by busting into a fragging apartment, neh? Think I like that.)<<<<<

—Hardcase (09:15:50/5-10-56)

>>>>>(True enough. But the security in your typical *alcázar* isn't much less than you'd find at a corp facility, because your typical *alcázar* is a corp facility.)<<<<<

—Laz (12:27:09/5-10-56)

Standard working times are different from those in Seattle. (I know few outfits run on the old nine-to-seventeen work day, even in Seattle. But some do.) In Aztlan, the standard biz day starts at about 0800 and runs to noon. Then it's time for lunch and a siesta. (A carry-over from the weird old days, but kind of a cultural tradition.) Back to the grind at 1500, and work to 2000 or 2100. (That's 3 p.m., 8 p.m., and 9 p.m. for any of you slow slubs not used to thinking in 24-hour time.) Dinner—the big meal of the day, and generally pretty fragging lavish—usually takes place around 2200.

The corp suits with the real big mojo usually have local digs-es in the *castillos*—penthouses, as often as not—and also mansions outside the city proper. Come the weekend, the top-drawer suits desert the cities like rats pouring out of a burning building to go play landed gentry in their walled estates. Starting about 1700 on Fridays, the airspace over the city buzzes with private short-hop carriers ferrying the high muckamucks to their getaways. The air's clearer out thataway, though the corporators still have to wear their acid rain-resistant ponchos when it drizzles. (Must torque them off to no end that they can't do anything about the acid rain. By and large, pollution knows no class boundaries.)

>>>>>(How come the high-and-mighty Azzie priests don't use magic to clean things up a little? If there's so much fragging power just sitting there in the *teocalli*, why don't they put it to good use? And before you say, "because they're evil and nasty," let me remind you that the magic-types have to breathe the drekky air, too. The NAN nations did a bang-up job of restoring the environment with magic—why not Aztlan?)<<<<<

—Moncrieff (14:23:45/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Good question—one I think bears looking into.)<<<<<

—Magister (15:01:33/5-11-56)

BURAKUMIN

You know that old saying about how the rich always get richer and the poor get poorer? Holy writ in Aztlan. The *burakumin*—that's nasty corp-speak for "unaffiliated" workers—are stuck right in the middle of that little equation. Struggling like bastards to vault into the upper ranks, all the time praying they don't slide further down the scale.

Your typical *burakumin* lives in a "council complex"—a kind of co-op, run and partially subsidized by the government. They're clean, efficient, and totally fragging soulless places. Like the *castillos*, the council complexes try to include all facilities the residents need. Quality, though, is way downgraded. No flash restaurants—*burakumin* eat in commissaries, like cafeterias. (Same thumbprint deal as the *castillos*; by the way. Means no walk-in trade—not that anybody would *want* to walk in.)

Burakumin don't do the telepresence route. Most of them physically commute to their jobs. Most of the poor slots stuck in the cities' gridlocked rush hours are *burakumin*, of course.

>>>>>(My granddad was one of those. Even back in his day, it bit being a working slub. He took public transport to work every day, riding in little rattletrap train cars stuffed to the gills with sweaty, tired, cranky, overworked, and underpaid wageslaves. Once, the train was so crowded that he couldn't get out at his stop, or the next one, or the one after that. He had to ride the fragging train all the way to the fragging end of the line before it emptied enough for him to get out, cross over to the other side (for which he had to pay another fare), and ride back home. He told us afterward that he knew then it was time to retire.)<<<<<

—Moondog (22:13:44/5-19-56)

PEASANTS

Below the *burakumin*, you've got the *real* poor—the slubs who live outside the cities in the agricultural zones. Not many of them, relatively speaking—they're about 21 percent of the population. (That's a lot lower percentage of rural types than in most other countries in the Americas.) Most of these folks are peasants. That's how the urban hordes think of them, and that's how they think of themselves. They grow the food that feeds the cities. They break their backs doing it, and they get paid squat. Your typical peasant's big ambition is to make the trip to The City. They don't know what they'll do there, but they want to go anyway. Anything looks better than the squalid life they're used to living.

If you look at it a certain way, most of the peasants are "corporators" instead of *burakumin* because they work for the big corporations that run the agricultural zones. For all their corp ties, though, they get shat upon as bad as the *burakumin*. Maybe worse. Out in the zones, education level, standard of living, and per capita income all go into the drekker. *Not* nice places to hang.

>>>>>(Ah. An entire dissatisfied underclass, neh? Why aren't revolutionary groups trying to organize them and lead them against the bourgeoisie?)<<<<<

—Gagnon (08:16:09/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Chummer, some are trying. The Catholic Church, for example, does good biz in the poorer zones. But it's a tough battle for the hearts and minds of the peasants, don't think otherwise. Sure, they want more. They want what the urban multitude have. But they know what'll happen to them if they make waves. Cause trouble and you get cut loose by the corp—kicked out of the zones, kicked out of your subsidized (albeit grotty) housing. Cut loose from the teat that feeds you (granted, typically hind teat ...). That's a scary concept, chummers. Sure, life's hard in the zones. But it's milk and honey compared to how the real peasants live.)<<<<<

—Thibault (09:27:42/5-10-56)

And then there's the subsistence farmers. Most of them are "traditionals," that is, Mesoamerinds, as compared to the mainly *mestizo* folks in the agricultural zones. Omae, for these slubs things ain't changed since the fragging 18th century. They're still eking out a borderline existence on farmland that's not good enough for the agricultural corps to bother annexing. They live in the worst squalor you can imagine. They speak their own languages—some can't understand Aztlaner Spanish to save their lives—and follow their own cultural traditions, as if Columbus never found the New World.

They're usually pretty tight-knit groups. If you ain't from the same cultural tradition—if you don't speak their ancient language—you ain't drek. You're an alien, an invader, a potential enemy. They won't trust you far as they can spit a rat.

Most are illiterate, uneducated. They're hardly even part of modern-day Aztlan. If all the cities got nuked to glass some bright morning, the subsistence farmers wouldn't even notice.

>>>>>(Flipside's got the picture for good and all. I once visited a Tarascan village in the highlands of Michoacan State. (Not really my idea. I needed to go head-down until an Azzie payback team lost interest in me.) I figured the locals might feel some sympathy for someone as "oppressed" as they were.

No go, chummer. Wouldn't even give me the time of day, let alone listen to my sob stories. They just watched me sullenly, didn't even so much as talk to me. Just sat on the stoops of their little huts and glared at me until I slunk away.)<<<<<

—NFA (12:55:09/5-13-56)

SHADOWRUNNERS

And then there's the group you slags are going to be most interested in: the shadow community.

Aztlan's runners all live in the cities (no surprise). Not much biz to be done in the agricultural zones, after all, and forget about the traditionals' villages. SINless, rootless, often homeless—hey, it's just like home!

The shadow community breaks down into two categories. There's the Mexicans—*not* Aztlaners, but Latino and Latina chums who hang tight together. If you don't sling the lingo, if you don't have the right cast to your eyes or color to your skin, they don't want to know you. They got their own fixers, they do their own biz, they keep their own counsel. Everything gets done through personal relationships. These boyos don't care squat about your bragsheet or your street rep. If they don't know you, they don't *want* to know you—not for biz, at least. It's fragging near impossible to earn their trust. If you manage it, though, you're in. You're like a long-lost cousin, and they'll trust you with their lives—until you hose them once. Then they'll hunt you down and splatter your brains. It's a matter of honor, omae. And honor is more important to these boyos and girlchicks than oxygen.

>>>>>(Echo that. It's a tight club, but you can make your way in if you prove to them that you hold honor in the same kind of obsessive esteem that they do. It's not just a talking game, either. Everything you do must be determined by honor. Set one foot wrong—do something, no matter how minor, that shows you don't have honor—and any progress you've made goes right out the fragging door.)<<<<<

—Elise (04:56:39/5-10-56)

>>>>>(I'd call the whole honor thing a case of machismo, except that the women buy into it too. It's not an all-male shop by any means. (Hell, some of the chicas I've had occasion to meet would give your typical Seattle gillette some nasty nightmares.))<<<<<

—Glad-Rag (13:10:16/5-12-56)

There's also the "imports" (as the local runners call them) and "mercenaries." These types ain't Mexican; lots of them ain't even from Aztlan. They come to the country looking for biz and cred. While most of the locals do biz based on how it'll help *Aztlan*, the imports do biz based on how it'll help their cred balances. (That's how the locals see it, anyway.)

The shadows that the imports run are distinct from the locals. The import market operates more the way things do in Seattle. Professional fixers divvy up the jobs based on bragsheets and rep. Understandably, it's much easier to penetrate this market. "Import" fixers often have ties with fixers in other cities, even Seattle, so they can check up on your bragsheet when you approach them. If you've got the skillset and the jam, they've got the biz.

Let's talk size. Nationwide, the Aztlan shadow community is pretty fragging big. Maybe 500 "A-list" players live in Tenochtitlán, and a matching proportion live in the other major cities.

>>>>>(Five hundred? That's huge.)<<<<<

—Larkspur (16:15:09/5-6-56)

The import community is much smaller, more like the numbers you'd expect in Seattle (maybe even smaller than that). Take San Diego—about the same size as Seattle, right? The import community there is well under 100, including the wannabes. Pure A-list players, figure maybe 50, maybe less.

>>>>>(Sounds like there's space in the market ...)<<<<<

—Span (21:16:09/5-11-56)

ECONOMY

>>>>>(Here's another of those amazing documents that Espectro sent in his eclectic collection of information. This section comes to us from an internal report created by a major multinational investment-counseling/accounting/management-consulting firm: Peat-Marwick-Thorne-Mabasu for those of you keeping score at home.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (13:21:09/5-1-56)

The economy of Aztlan offers important and profitable opportunities for aggressive, canny investors. Because of various local conditions, however, standard investment strategies are inappropriate. This document provides PMTM counselors and analysts with an introduction to those conditions. Further details appear in related PMTM datafiles and e-pubs.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] I'll be sure to alert my broker.

CURRENCY

The currency of Aztlan is the peso, and this base currency has no subdivisions. Theoretically, the peso is divided into 100 centavos, but coins and bills of denominations less than one peso were long ago withdrawn from circulation. Hard currency is available in 100-peso denominations. Coins are available in denominations of up to 10,000 pesos, while plasti-weave bills are available in denominations ranging into the millions of pesos. (Note that the coins are not the solid metal they appear to be; they are densiplast with a metallicized coating.)

Aztlan's currency is not based on the gold standard or on any other concrete standard. Like the UCAS dollar, the value of the peso is based on the public *perception* that it has value—in other words, on the credibility and reputation of the Aztlan government. As of 2/14/56, 500 pesos are nominally equivalent to 1 nuyen on the international exchange market; this figure has not fluctuated by more than a percentage point or two in the past seven years. The Aztlan government has a history of acting rapidly and aggressively to maintain the value of its currency at what it considers to be an advantageous level. The peso is stabilized by high-volume arbitrage on the international currency market, managed by a sophisticated expert system provided to the government free of charge by Aztechnology.

>>>>>(Oooh, nasty brain-flash.)<<<<<

—Capcom (00 54 25/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Forget it.)<<<<<

—Red Wraith (23:11:46/5-7-56)

>>>>>(For those of you who need the above exchange subtitled our young friend Capcom just rediscovered the theory of gravity, or something equally fundamental. Thinks he: "If I can slice into that Azzie expert system, I can hold their entire fragging economy hostage!" And he's right, of course. If

The Ghostly One reminded him that pulling off such a coup is one big fragging if.)<<<<<

FastJack (01:24:05/5-8-56)

Currency Classes

The peso comes in two classes: the more common "peso norma," or standard peso, and the "peso libre," or free peso. Only the peso norma is available in coins and bills. Pesos libres exist only as electronic credit balances.

If a credit balance in an account or on a credstick comprises both pesos normas and pesos libres, a different balance is kept

for each type of currency. A standard account query will report the aggregate total; a detailed query will distinguish between the two balances. Electronic balances of pesos libres are always accompanied by an "audit trail," tracing the origin of the credit.

It is illegal to convert the peso norma into any other currency, though it is perfectly legal to convert foreign currencies into pesos normas. In fact, the latter can be done at any government-sanctioned exchange office (*cambio*), at any bank, and at many stores and other businesses. It is also illegal to take pesos normas out of the country. (Strictly speaking, a traveler who does not leave his pocket change behind may face arrest and prosecution.)

>>>>>(The first time I got caught by this little setup, it scared the drek out of me. I knew I had maybe half a million pesos on my credstick. But when I went in to a government cambio to buy nuyen, they told me my available balance was only something like 25K pesos. Where the frag had the rest of my cred gone?

The problem, of course, was that my half-mil represented the aggregate account balance, most of which was nonconvertible pesos normas. I only had about 25K in pesos libres that I could convert to nuyen.)<<<<<

—Gina E (12:13:04/5-9-56)

Only the Aztlan government or Aztechnology Corporation may issue credsticks in the form of pesos libres. The peso libre is freely convertible and may legally be taken out of the country. The recipient of such a credit issue is free to spend those pesos libres within the country or export them, giving pesos libres the same utility as pesos normas.

A major difference arises, however, when a business or individual receives pesos libres from another business or individual (presumably the recipient of an authorized governmental or corporate credit issue). The recipient is bound by law to convert those pesos libres immediately into pesos normas. This conversion generally takes place automatically, as soon as the recipient's bank account is updated. It is a felony to offer or accept payment in pesos libres unless the payer is the direct recipient of a governmental/corporate credit issue. The audit trail that always accompanies a pesos libres balance makes this a simple matter to check.

>>>>>(So do you chummers and chummettes scan this? It ain't as complex as it sounds. (Well, okay, it is as complex as it sounds.) The stone word here is, "free pesos" can never get more than one "step" away from Aztlan/Aztechnology, the issuer. Say Aztechnology pays off Jane Q. Consultant in pesos libres. She's one "step" away from the issuer, and her credstick shows that fact. Now Jane goes out to buy a spiffing new gat, and she pays off the gunsmith in pesos libres. He's two "steps" away from the issuer. Through the magic of computers, the pesos libres he's received magically become pesos normas as soon as his bank balance is updated. (No skin off his hoop, really. They both have the same buying power. It only makes a difference if he's planning on taking his cred out of the country.)

This conversion doesn't happen on Mr. Gunsmith's credstick. It happens the next time he slots that stick to update his bank. So theoretically, he could take the stick, bulging with pesos libres, and spend them on something: paying his rent, for example. But if he does, both he and the person who takes his cred are up for felony charges. So it's a good idea to synch your stick with the bank as soon as you receive any payment in pesos libres, if you want to avoid deep dark trouble.

Scan it now?)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (11:34:08/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Predictably, there's a drekload of black-market dealing in pesos libres. (Hell, in some parts of the country, the currency market is the only part of the economy that fragging works ...) Lots of data-jocks out there are making a damn fine living diddling the electronic audit trails on credsticks to make a sum of pesos libres look like a "first step" balance. It's tough, and it's not going to pass a deep-background audit trace. (The Aztechnology computer sure as hell knows who it issued pesos libres to, and if you're not on the list it doesn't matter a frag what your credstick says.))<<<<<

—Red Wraith (23:19:51/5-7-56)

Both pesos libres and pesos normas have exactly the same buying power. Few Aztlan citizens ever receive pesos libres, and even fewer care. Pesos libres and pesos normas exchange at 1-to-1, and so have a 500-to-1 valuation against the nuyen.

>>>>>(The 500-to-1 figure is nominal; mark that well. "Nominal" means you'll never get that rate. If you're buying pesos, you'll get something like 480 or 490 aP to the nuyen (the discount depends on the size of the transaction and who you're doing your biz with). Selling pesos (pesos libres only, remember), you'll spend 510 to 520 aP to get a single nuyen.)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (11:38:05/5-10-56)

IMPORTS AND EXPORTS

Economically, Aztlan has largely made the transition from a primary, resource-based economy through the secondary manufacturing-based stage to a tertiary, information-based economy. This judgment applies to the nation as a whole; however, many parts of the country lag behind. Even today, segments of the population survive by subsistence farming, much as they did two hundred years ago.

Agriculture still plays a major role in Aztlan's economy. Roughly 27 percent of the population works in the agriculture field in one way or another. Many agricultural workers are employed on communal farms, known locally as *ejidos*. So effective is the *ejidos* system that Aztlan is entirely self-sufficient when it comes to food. Aquaculture is also an important facet of the economy.

>>>>>(Chummers, Aztechnology is hot drek when it comes to aquaculture. You gotta take a look down in the Sea of Cortez at all the sea-farms the Azzies have got going. Man, it's spectacular: kilohectares of pens (the netting kind, and also the new tech based on laminar water flow), just writhing with fragging shrimp and anchovies and pike and red snapper.)<<<<<

—Naf-Naf (00:15:09/5-7-56)

Major exports include food products (largely specialty items, such as shrimp aquacultured for export), natural gas, coffee, zinc, textiles, and various technological products. Major imports include steel, titanium, beryllium, and other strategic metals; industrial and agricultural machinery; and chemicals. The nation's key trading partners are UCAS, CAS, several of the NAN nations, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Germany.

>>>>>(And therein lies one of the great rules of global trade: you don't have to like a country to do biz with it.)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (11:40:14/5-10-56)

There is also the sensitive issue of Aztlan's export trade in cocaine and its derivatives. The nation of Aztlan comprises a broad expanse of what have traditionally been major koka-growing lands. Foreign governments have pressured the Aztlan government to control the illegal drug trade, and Aztechnology is especially sensitive to the problem given its historical mission to distance itself from its unsavory origins in criminal drug cartels.

>>>>>(Cocaine? In this day and age? Thought everyone was into chips these days.)<<<<<

—Trancer (23:21:15/11-5-56)

>>>>>(Yeah, sure. You got five bucks in your pocket from a trick or mugging some wretch poorer than you are in the slums and you just about got enough for a quick crack fix. You don't even think about chips—how do you play 'em? Rent the chipreader from the library? Coke may not be the drug of choice for the overaffluent, neurologically compromised American middle classes anymore, but down on the streets it's the same killer it always was. And Aztechnology makes money out of it, whatever they say in public.)<<<<<

—MesoStim (01:14:43/11-05-56)

Aztechnology and the Aztlan government both produce glossy publications and promo trids showing their latest successes in the "war against drugs," and they blame the fact that Aztlan is still a significant exporter of cocaine on the activities of rebellious and seditious elements. They claim that the Yucatán "terrorists" and other disaffected elements smuggle coke out and sell it to organized crime in the UCAS and the CAS and in Europe in return for arms. While what the coporation claims is true, their claims represent only half the story. The profit margin on cocaine is so astronomical that all foreign governments assume that Aztechnology continues to support the drug trade. Analysis shows a significant probability percentile that the corporation sells to criminal buyers overseas eager to pay premium prices for what is extremely pure merchandise produced in the Aztechnology labs.

>>>>>(Don't forget that Aztechnology has a small and controlled legal market in cocaine—it's a useful anaesthetic and analgesic, after all. Ask your dentist. This allows the company to maintain, quite openly, small-scale facilities for growing and purifying the stuff. It's just that the yields are, shall we say, significantly larger than the company's official bookkeeping suggests. There are also plenty of peasant subsistence farmers living in the back of beyond all too ready to sell their produce to guys with shades who no-one could ever prove were Aztechnology reps.

Further, Aztechnology needs to keep this export line open to counter the Yucatán guys. They can stymy the Yucatán exporters by exporting their own purer stuff at a better price, thus cutting off vital funds for the rebels. They can also use their own criminal connections overseas to track down Yucatán exporters and eliminate them with covert ops.

Yes, of course foreign governments know about this. Yes of course they have local diplomats who make protests about it. And yes, of course, those diplomats usually file misleading reports back home understating the role of the government and the company in the trade, because they have coke-fuelled credsticks hanging out their backsides courtesy of Aztechnology. Some things never change.)<<<<<

—Nuyen Nick (23:12:45/12-10-56)

>>>>>(No one's quite sure which division or subsidiary of Aztechnology handles nose candy, and you can be sure that these data are in a system with a security rating somewhere between Hell and Post-Nuclear-Meltdown.)<<<<<

—Slater (22:15:31/12-5-56)

THE STOCK MARKET

Aztlan's highly active stock market is a "virtual exchange" with no physical location. Traders "visit" the exchange via the Matrix or—more commonly—leave the entire trading process up to high-speed expert systems.

Only government-licensed brokers may do business on the Aztlan exchange, a practice that distinguishes it from many other virtual exchanges around the world. In general, foreign investors—even of institutional size, such as PMTM—find it easier to conduct business through local trading houses than to acquire licenses for their own personnel.

>>>>>(Yet another way in which Aztlan/Aztechnology keeps a tight hold on who can do biz in its economy. "You can't buy stocks without our approval, you can't take money out of the country without our approval," and on and on.)<<<<<

—JohnnyZ (13:41:02/5-5-56)

The vast majority of shares traded on the Aztlan exchange are issued by Aztechnology or its many subsidiaries. According to an urban myth, every share traded on the exchange relates to Aztechnology in some way, and active trading in a particular security implies direct ties to Aztechnology. This fable, however, is untrue.

>>>>>(Just for yuks, I did a kind of "security audit" on the Aztlan virtual exchange. Chummer, it's tight. Not impossibly tight, but still definitely hot turf if you're not playing strictly by the rules. If you're down for it, you can try all the joyful little nasties discussed in Corporate Shadowfiles—all the twisted little ways of jacking somebody off via

AZTLAN COST OF LIVING TABLE

ITEM	COST (% of Seattle prices)
Weapons and Armor	
Ammunition[1]	95
Armor[2]	115
Explosives[3]	130
Firearm Accessories[4]	90
Firearms	95
Melee Weapons	90
Projectile Weapons	90
Throwing Weapons	90
Surveillance and Security	
Communications	95
Security Devices	110
Surveillance Countermeasures[5]	200
Surveillance Equipment	130
Survival Gear	100
Vision Enhancers	90
Lifestyle	
Lifestyle	110

ITEM	COST (% of Seattle prices)
Weapons and Armor	
Cybertech and Electronics	
Biotech[6]	140
Bodyware	140
Cyberdecks[7]	160
Electronic Equipment	95
Headware	140
Internals	140
Programs[8]	—
Magical Equipment	
Hermetic Library	100
Magical Supplies	100
Magical Weapons[9]	—
Power Foci	90
Ritual Sorcery Materials	180
Spell Foci	95
Vehicles	
Aircraft	130
Boats	140
Ground Vehicles	120
Military Vehicles[10]	—

stock transactions—but it's going to be a touch tougher down in Tenochtitlán than in Seattle. Word to the wise, neh?)<<<<<

—Interrupt (09:46:01/5-8-56)

>>>>>**(Price Differentials**

Hey, folks, I'm back. Did you miss me? I understand somebody else picked up the baton while I was "paying my debt to society" (yeah, right). Thanks, chummer, but I'm back in the saddle again.

Where was I? Oh yeah, price differentials. I know it's Seattle-centric to do it this way, but the table shows the cost-of-living details you all so love to argue over, based on percentages of what you'd pay in Seattle.

Cost of Living Notes

1. If you've been in the Aztlan Zone up Denver way, you know the name of this tune. Wizzer stuff is restricted to megacorporate (read Aztechnology) sec-forces. No, you can't buy APDS, explosive, or even belt-fed rounds. And you for-drek-sure can't buy assault cannon rounds or anything larger (mortar rockets or Ballista rockets, for example) on the legal, open market.

2. Light and medium body armor is fine—no legal restrictions, and even some of the snooty Tenochtitlán restaurants won't quirk an eyebrow if you jander in wearing a suit of medium hide-insurance. Heavy armor's legal, but if you wear it openly every fragging Azzie hard-man you see is going to follow you trying to find out why. Military grade? Don't make me bark. Highly illegal, and (worse) stupid!

3. We're talking construction/demolition explosives here, the kind of thing a contractor uses to implode a building or remove a chunk of basalt blocking a planned new autoroute. This stuff's available only to government-licensed buyers. "Personal" explosives like hand grenades? Tightly restricted (no kidding, neh?).

4. People always worry about the legality/availability of smartlinks. No huhu, cobber—legal and easy to obtain in Aztlan. Be aware, however, that local policia and sec-forces know that, and assume every perp they go after is wired.

5. Gotta be licensed by the government to buy this drek. Aztechnology makes it, so their hardboys have no trouble getting mitts on wiz stuff

6. Just like in Denver, the only cyberware you can get installed legally is pure prosthetics with no bells-and-whistles. Like, if you lose an eye you can get a cybereye dropped in ... but it can't have low light, flare comp, any of the wizzer stuff. Ditto for limbs: no strength increase, and no—no drek!—implanted weapons. You want the wizzer toys, hunt them up in ye Olde Shadowes and bring a hefty credstick (expect a Street Index of close to 3). Also, good luck finding a shadow-cutter willing to install the hardware once you've found it.

7. Don't get excited, deckers: this figure is for legal cyberdecks, the ones with their "signature" chips hardwired in so you can't defeat them. The kind of deck you want is strictly illegal. Shadows again, at a Street Index of 3 or thereabouts.

8. I know you're not scanning for drek like Microsoft WORD 20.5, so I won't insult your intelligence. Mirrors? Sleaze? Combat utilities? Shadow-time again. Street Index 3 and up

9. Totally and hideously illegal. Street Index cruises around 3.5 ... if you can find anything you'd consider buying.

10. Oh, sure.)<<<<<

—The Keynesian Kid (16:35:20/5-4-56)

LAWS, CRIME, AND PUNISHMENT

It's Captain Chaos himself, folks. Just for that old change o' pace, I decided to field this section. One note: If you've scanned the drek on the Front Range Free Zone (that's Denver—weren't you paying attention?), a lot of this will look familiar in a horrible, stomach-sinking kind of way. (Yeah, torques me off too, but if Aztlan wants to keep their rules and regs consistent, we've gotta go with the flow.)

Just as in the FRFZ, you can only guestimate the roughest guideline to fines and punishments for lawbreaking in Aztlan. The judiciary committees that decide what to do with you are pretty well free to inflict whatever nasties spin their cranks, precedents be damned. If you've scanned the FRFZ paydata, you'll see the general run of punishments is similar, with a few changes that might reflect a difference between the Aztlan Sector and Aztlan proper, or could be just a statistical glitch. (Not that it matters much when you're looking at the numbers from the wrong side of the law.)

WEAPONS

Aztlan has some pretty fragging lax weapons laws, all in all. Boys and girls, you'll hear people tell tales of jandering down the main drag in Medellín or Mazatlán with a Roomsweeper making that familiar bulge under the armored jacket. They're not yanking your chain, chummers—it's all real and for true.

The Azzies get away with this kind of drek mainly because the ACS and their little friends take to heart a paraphrase of that old Biblical chestnut, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, because I'm the baddest-assed, best-armed, heaviest-armored, raw-meat-eatingest motherfragging son of a slitch in the whole goddamned valley."

Case in point. Where I come from, your typical Lone Star boy-in-blue on the street packs a Thunderbolt autopistol as his personal sidearm. Autofire drek and "exotic" ammo—explosive, APDS, even APDU—comes out only when the fertilizer has hit the ventilator for fragging sure. In the wonderful world of Az, chummer, SMGs with a high cyclical rate of fire are standard-issue sidearms. It doesn't take much more than a street-corner altercation to send the ACS goons scampering for their assault rifles. The standard round of choice, even for day-to-day use, is APDS. Next step up is explosive ... and it doesn't take much to prompt that kind of escalation. Starting to get the picture?

Azzie law has some weird things to say about "collateral damage." If an ACS hardboy decides "keeping the peace" necessitates burning a clip into your chest—and if, by chance, a couple of rounds go wide and hit assorted innocent bystanders—it's *your fault*. You, not the hardboy, are legally liable for any and all collateral damage just as if you pulled the trigger in the first place. Remember that, boys and girls. It removes just one more incentive for an Azzie security goon *not* to pull the trigger.

>>>>>(Urk. You mean if an Azzie cop (or whatever) decides he doesn't like my face and starts busting caps at me, and a stray round geeks a civilian, I'm up for murder ?)<<<<<
—Son of Sam (12:06:22/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Precisely.)<<<<<
—IQ (16:33:15/5-9-56)

So here's the clean deal. You don't have to license pistols and SMGs. You can't threaten someone with them, and you sure as frag can't use them without some kind of comeback. But you can own and carry them, no huhu. As for other drek, it's okay to own and transport most any other weapon if you've got the right license. (In the table coming up, crimes like F1—possession of a rifle—are actually possession of an *unlicensed* rifle.) Of course, to get a license, you need a SIN, which you have to provide to the nice man in the Aztechnology uniform at the licensing office. No thanks.

Oh, and lest I forget ... like all of our most enlightened nations (Is my prejudice showing?), Aztlan doesn't make any

drek-headed distinction between "intent" and "use" of a weapon. (I mean, come on. I pull out my gat and try to blow your brains out, but I miss. Just because I'm incompetent, should I get off more lightly? I don't think so.)

CHIPS AND OTHER BRAIN-BENDERS

Mondo similarities between this drek and what you scanned in the FRFZ Azzie Sector datafiles. (Not much of a surprise, *neh?*)

Az-land is anally retentive in the extreme about chemical or electronic mindbenders crossing its borders. It's illegal to import any chips with a delta phi (DF) higher than "pretty fragging minuscule." BTLs and dreamchips? Forget it. Cal hots? No way, José. Even "juiced" but still UCAS-legal norms? Getting dicey. As for chem-stuff, a basic rule of thumb is, "If you'd enjoy it, you can't import it."

Security at the borders is pretty tight. Chemsniffers and trained paranimals scan for drugs, and magicians take a look-see from the astral for chips.

>>>>>(Buildrek. Doesn't work that way.)<<<<<
—Jojo Dancer (12:12:06/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Want to bet your life on that . ?)<<<<<
—Klerk (11:23:57/5-10-56)

That's the scoop on bringing drek into the country. Picking it up once you're there is a totally different scan, chummers. You can pick up high-mod simsense chips that make Cal hots look puppy. (Not quite BTLs, but pretty fragging close.) If the chemical trip is more your route, you've got the choice of all the fave ataractics, mindbenders, hypnotics, and hallucinogens: cram, Nirvana, jolt, electric lady, white-hot ... plus a few you've probably never heard of.

You don't have to drag around in the shadows for this drek, chummers. No sir. You just jander on up to an Aztechnology "entertainment store" and slap down your credstick. All legal and above board. The chips are guaranteed safe (well, as safe as high-mod boosts can possibly be), and the drugs are certified at 99.99 percent pure. (Hoo-hah!)

>>>>>(The good Captain's right about the credstick part. Azzie entertainment stores do not accept cash. (Sorry, bunkies ...) Gotta have a stick—and a SIN, and all the other accouterments of legal existence—if you wanna trip.)<<<<<
—Around the Bay (09:12:18/5-11-56)

>>>>>(The Azzies have never looked kindly on competition, even in the chip/drug trade. Only Aztechnology can sell simsense or chemical benders. Trafficking or possession with intent to traffic, even in drek the Big A sells to neighborhood kiddies, is illegal. Later on in this file it says trafficking will put you in the Big Slam for 10 years and up. Don't believe it, chummers. You'll just plain disappear, and your organs will be used for transplants. No drek.)<<<<<
—Carruthers (13:48:34/5-11-56)

>>>>>(This all fits hand-in-glove with the Azzie control of the truly lucrative cocaine trade. If they keep the market for themselves, it's easy to spot the malcontents trying to sell it under the table and to trace their sources (and subvert or destroy the competition). Once a criminal empire using bully-boys to enforce its law, always a criminal empire blah blah blah.)<<<<<
—DNF (17:36:54/5-12-56)

>>>>>(I read this drek in the FRFZ section. I didn't buy it then. I don't buy it now. Sure, Aztlan/Aztechnology pockets some extra cred by selling various mindbenders to all and sundry. But surely the societal cost is higher than whatever profit they're seeing. Why do it?)<<<<<
—Rooter (23:15:06/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Here's a couple of guesses, boyo. One: the chips and drugs Aztechnology sells contain various subliminals (chips) and trace chemicals (drugs) that ... um, how to say this? ... ensure a satisfactory measure of social obedience and well-being. Two the Azzies like to know exactly who's using this drek and in what quantities. Makes it easier to put the lever on someone, or to see if they're vulnerable to someone else putting the lever on.)<<<<<

—DNF (15:08:26/5-12-56)

Alcohol is largely unrestricted. It's easy to bring into and out of the country, and available just about anywhere you happen to be. (Next time you're down south, check out the cerveza—that's beer—vending machines on convenient street corners.)

>>>>>(If Aztechnology had any social spirit at all, it'd stop exporting feathered serpents, explosives and pissy moods, and start selling xtabantun worldwide. Never drunk xtabantun? Your loss, chummers. Nectar of the fragging gods. Tastes like ouzo that's gone to heaven. Dandelion-eaters go right fragged over the stuff, say it's like some drek they drink up in the Tir.)<<<<<

—Sot (11:41:38/5-10-56)

CYBERWARE

Azzie law requires you to register your chrome with the relevant government agency—in other words, with the branch of Aztechnology that takes care of this sort of thing. If you're already chromed coming into the nation, check out the earlier discussions on getting in. Before you go under the laser in Aztlan, you have to register your intention (or your doctor has to if it's an emergency replacement) and get the appropriate license. Anything else is illegal, and you're for the chop if you try it.

CYBERDECKS

Surprise, surprise—illegal for any slot to own one without the appropriate (and very restrictive) license. Licenses must be renewed every year, and at renewal time you've got to *prove* your deck has a "nonstealth" chipset—in other words, that it writes all the appropriate signatures to the Matrix audit trail. Possession of stealthsets is *real bad*.

Here's all the skinny on fines and punishments, as far as I could discover. Happy scanning!

(All Fines Listed in Thousands of Pesos)

WEAPON FINES AND PUNISHMENT TABLE

	Offense and Fine/Imprisonment			
Weapon Type	**Possession (1)**	**Transport (2)**	**Threat (3)**	**Use (4)**
(A) Small Bladed Weapon	—	—	4,000/6 months	12,000/1 year
(B) Large Bladed Weapon	—	1,500/2 months	10,000/1 year	20,000/5 years
(C) Blunt Weapon	—	—	4,000/6 months	12,000/1 year
(D) Projectile Weapon	—	2,000/2 months	10,000/1 year	20,000/5 years
(E) Pistol*	—	—	10,000/1 year	20,000/5 years
(F) Rifle	5,000/6 months	5,000/6 months	20,000/3 years	33,000/10 years
(G) Automatic Weapons	12,500/2 years	12,500/2 years	25,000/4 years	**
(H) Heavy Weapons	20 years	**	**	**
(I) Explosives	12,500/2 years	12,500/2 years	25,000/5 years	50,000/10 years
(J) Military Weapons	**	**	**	**
(K) Military Armor	3 years***	3 years***	—	—
(L) Military Ammunition	7,500/1 year	7,500/1 year	—	5 years
(BA) Class A Bioware	100,000	—	—	—
(BB) Class B Bioware	2 years	—	—	—
(BC) Class C Bioware	10 years	—	—	—
(CA) Class A Cyberware	2 years	—	—	—
(CB) Class B Cyberware	4 years	—	—	—
(CC) Class C Cyberware	**	—	—	—
(EA) Class A Equipment	12,000	—	—	—
(EB) Class B Equipment	2 years	—	—	—
(EC) Class C Equipment	10 years	—	—	—
(MA) Class A Controlled	1,500	10 years	—	—
(MB) Class B Controlled	10 years	—	—	—
(MC) Class C Controlled	**	—	—	Death penalty

*This class of weapons includes SMGs.

**People convicted of these offenses tend to vanish (sometimes before they're convicted).

***Heavy combat armor only.

CRIMINAL OFFENSES AND PUNISHMENT TABLE

(All Fines in Thousands of Pesos)

Offense	Sentence
Arson	25,000/1 year
Assault	5,000
Battery	5,000
Extortion	2–5 years
Forcible Confinement	2–10 years
Fraud	2–5 years
Illegal Entry	3 years
Kidnapping	5–10 years
Larceny (petty)	6 months–2 years
Larceny (grand)	2–10 years
Murder 1	30 years to life or death penalty
Murder 2	20 years to life
Murder 3	1–5 years
Negligence	1–5 years
Rape	2–5 years
Rape (statutory)	2–10 years
Reckless Endangerment	25,000/1 year
Solicitation	10,000
Trafficking	10 years to life or death penalty
Treason	10 years to life or death penalty*
Vandalism	5,000+
Accessory	50 percent normal
Conspiracy	75 percent normal

*Usually the latter (no drek).

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

>>>>>(Here to explain what's going down with the Aztlan government—how it works (or more typically doesn't), who to bribe/suborn, and all that joyful stuff—is our local political analyst and consultant, Carmen Hidalgo. Brought to you courtesy of your friendly neighborhood Neo-Anarchists, so salt it some before swallowing it ... but the lady's pretty on-target.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (09:51:15/5-4-56)

>>>>>(Neo-Anarchists? Oh drek, get your ideology filters ready.)<<<<<

—Bung (10:25:05/5-8-56)

So you want to know how the Aztlan government works? Let's see whether we can ferret out any sense from the chaos.

A note before we get going here: the way the Aztlan government *seems* to work, and how it *actually* works are two different plates of soypaste. As I rattle through this, I'll try to give you my own sterling insights into what's *really* crawling and squirming under the surface. 'Kay?

Are you sitting comfortably? Then we'll begin.

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

Officially, the government of Aztlan today is no different from the one that ruled when the place was called Mexico. Aztlan is a federal republic—that's what it says here on the package—governed under a constitution that dates back more than a century (to 1917, if you actually care).

(Actually, I'd lay cred that the only word in the original that hasn't been amended, revoked, changed, or otherwise folded/spindled/mutilated is "constitution." Pavón the ex-Jesuit and his Azatlán party tossed in a couple dozen amendments, and since then more have been added at a rate of something like five per year. And then in 2044, at about the same time Aztechnology pushed for nationalization of foreign corporations, the government added an entire new section to the constitution. The section, which contains nearly 4.2 megapulses of data, is not publicly accessible. In other words, if you're an Aztlaner, you can't read all of your own fragging constitution! Try it yourself. Log onto an Aztlan server node and retrieve the constitution. At the end of the file, look for the notation TEXT DELETED FOR NATIONAL SECURITY REASONS. I drek you not! What's in that "secret constitution"? Don't know for sure.)

>>>>>(Whoa, hinky. Anyone out there gone data-diving for the paydata?)<<<<<

—Jonas (02.16:01/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Been there, done that. Got it last year. It's nothing real scary, just a bunch of provisions giving Aztechnology a drek-load of rights and privileges nobody else can touch. (Nothing we couldn't have guessed, neh?) But what I find most scary is the fact that the Aztlaner constitution contains a "top secret" section in the first place. What's in it now may not be ball-busting. But who's to say what the Azzies are going to drop into it tomorrow?)<<<<<

—Red Wraith (10.02.53/5-10-56)

>>>>>(The Ghostly One's right. One of the things I was trying to do when I went a-fishing in the Heart of Darkness was find a "warm link" that would update the Nexus any time anything changed in that secure portion of the constitution. Fragging near cost me half my cerebral cortex before I could get out, and the warm link wouldn't configure when I tried it after the fact.)<<<<<

—FastJack (21.43 05/5-10-56)

As in most federal republics, the Aztlaner government's split into executive and legislative branches. The chief executive is the president. Currently the office is held by a woman, Flavia de la Rosa, who defeated Francisco Gortari in 2053's general elections. (Don't go getting excited about an incumbent getting ousted. The whole fragging thing was a set piece. Both Gortari and de la Rosa are Azatlán Party candidates. Gortari was simply getting old and tired, and he wanted out. The *eminences grises* behind the electoral process (don't worry, I'll yap about them later) decided that, since Gortari wanted to go out to pasture anyway, it would play well to have him defeated in an "obviously free and fair" election. Hence de la Rosa's accession to the hot seat.) Presidents serve six-year terms, just like in the old (pre-Aztlan) days. *Un*like the old days, there's no limit on the number

of terms they can serve. (It used to be one term per person, no reelection possible, and next player please.)

The president appoints the cabinet members—generally party faithful and other hacks who've earned their turn at the patronage trough—and may replace them at any time. Any appointment to the cabinet has to be confirmed by congress, but that's simply a formality. Often, the prez doesn't get around to mentioning a change to the congress until a couple of months down the road—when he or she finds the time and the inclination to abide by the constitution.

Aztlan's congress is a two-branch body, consisting of upper and lower houses. The upper house is a senate with 64 seats. Senators are elected publicly and directly—courtesy of a national computer network—and serve six-year terms like the president. (Half the senate faces reelection the same year as the president, the other half in midterm.)

The lower house—more like a zoo, when you come down to it—is the Chamber of Deputies. Many of its 500 squabbling yahoos are dragged in from the sticks. If you make it to the zoo, you're in for a three-year term. By the way, it's illegal for senators and deputies to serve two consecutive terms. Consecutive. You can always come back later for another kick at the rat, and many do. (I remember two clever deps—brother and sister, they were—who traded seats in the lower house for twelve years. Nothing like keeping it in the family, *neh?*)

If you really want to know the process for getting a bill signed into law, let me know and I'll give you the dope via e-mail. Right now, let's just say that either house can propose bills—with some funky little tweaks and twiddles to restrict things and keep it interesting. If the lower house passes a bill, the senate must approve it with a simple majority to make it into law. If the senate passes a bill, the proposal automatically becomes law unless a two-thirds majority in the Chamber of Deputies votes to oppose it.

See where this is leading? Basically, the lower house is just a coffee klatch where people get up and make meaningless speeches, get in arguments (sometimes fistfights), and try to convince themselves they're relevant. The chamber may propose drekloads of bills, but few ever become law. Those the chamber does pass usually die quiet deaths in the senate. And bills coming down from the senate? Chummers, the 500 squabbling, self-aggrandizing yahoos in the chamber can hardly agree on what fragging day it is, let alone get their thumbs out long enough to vote down a bill by a two-thirds majority. So all the real power resides in the upper house, making the Chamber of Deputies about as meaningful in the grand scheme as a barrel full of mewling kittens.

>>>>>(Carmen's dead-bang right on that. Got the "privilege" of watching the Chamber of Deputies in action from the spectators' gallery last year. Gawd, what a mess. Some old aristocratic-looking joe's up front making a rambling speech about something. A third of the seats are empty. Of the rest, half the losers sitting there are asleep. Those who aren't napping are too busy yapping among themselves, eating, and talking on the phone to actually accomplish anything. It's a damn fragging good thing the Chamber of Deputies doesn't have any real power.)<<<<<

—Argent (21:57:10/5-10-56)

Local Governments

Aztlan's divided into 40 administrative divisions, which comprise 39 states (including the Johnny-come-latelies like the "states" of Guatemala, Panama, Colombia, and the like) and the *Distrito Federal* (Federal District), which is where the national government throws its parties.

Each state has its own government, headed by a governor who's elected electronically by the residents of his own state for a six-year term (no limits on reelection). Each state also has a

Chamber of Deputies—typically seating about 40, though this varies from state to state (Colombia has only 12, for example). Deputies are elected for three-year terms; again no limits on re-election, and it's not unheard of for deputies to kick off from old age while still incumbent.

The *Distrito Federal* is a special case. No legislature, just a governor who's appointed directly by the prez. (Again, congress has to ratify the president's decision—but never has failed to do so.)

Opposition Parties

Yes, Virginia, there *are* opposition parties in Aztlan, though I'll be fragged if I know why they bother. The Azatlán Party that took power after the VITAS nastiness in 2011/2012 (Pavón—you remember him) has kept it, without any real challenge, ever since. Basically, the Azatlán Party is Aztlan, and that's the name of that tune. And the opposition parties? Well, let's take an analogy here. I remember seeing some historical trid show about a basketball team back around the turn of the century—the Harlem Globetrotters, I guess they were called. Supposed to be the best in the world, never lost a game. Of course, when they went on tour they brought along their *own opposing team*—someone to beat. The way I scan it, *that's* why the Azatlán Party lets the opposition squads keep on plugging. So who's who among the losers? Let's hit the major players first.

The *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN) and the *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN) top the list. They were the two major parties right before the VITAS hit. Now, historically the PAN had been closely linked with the Catholic Church. Once the Mother Church got shat upon and repressed, the PAN changed its public face. It's still an open secret that the church—which has gone underground—still backs the PAN and even sends its Jesuit holy knee-breakers out to help the party's fortunes from time to time. (Not that it does a whit of good. Sorry, Loyola.)

The FDN? Well, they're nominally leftist, but that doesn't begin to describe it. Three factions inside the FDN scrap it out with the others for dominance. There's a centrist faction, trying to back off on the FDN's "social democratic" rhetoric. There's a hard-left faction, basically unreconstructed communists (don't these guys ever die?). And then there's a group of hard-nosed pragmatists—no ideology worth discussing. They'll sell their souls to anyone, left, right, center, or butt-end-forward, who'll get them elected.

>>>>>(If you're looking for shadowbiz south of the border and don't care whose cred you take, there's a big demand in the political sphere for experts at dirty tricks. Whatever contract you take, it's not going to make any real difference anyway—all the petty infighting is about as meaningful as rearranging the deck chairs on the Achille Lauro. But if that doesn't bother you, go for it.)<<<<<

—Hangfire (09:47:18/5-8-56)

Then there's the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, the good ol' PRI. The PRI used to have a hammer lock on Mexican politics back around the turn of the century and many long moons before that too, but the FDN and PAN (a leftist-Catholic coalition, yee-hah) booted them out just before the VITAS. These days the PRI's pretty fragging marginalized. It used to be the party of Big Biz, but today where's Big Biz hanging in Aztlan? With Aztechnology, of course. Big Biz don't have time for meaningless hacks like the PRI boys. Still, somehow the PRI manages to hang around, screaming bloody blue murder about nearly everything the government does—and being pretty well ignored by the electorate at large.

>>>>>(I think you're shortchanging the PRI, Carmen. The party's well funded and well organized. It never gets elected, of course, but I'm sure its leadership knows it never will. Yet it just keeps rollin' along.

Why? Who backs it? Who funds it? Who organizes it? My guess is the other megacorps. The way I scan it, Ares for one uses the PRI as a kind of "cadre" for in-country ops. In fact, if I was an Aztlan-based runner and I was scrounging for an Ares gig, I'd probably start hanging with PRI loyalists, attending meetings and that kind of drek.)<<<<<

—Low Ranger (23:41:52/5-16-56)

>>>>>(Hey, Low. What kept you?)<<<<<

—FastJack (01:40:16/5-17-56)

And then there's the also-rans. Too many of them to list, but take my word, they run the weirdest gamut. Look and ye shall find whatever flakey outfit it is you're looking for. You've got leftists, fascists, freedom-for-Mesoamerinds, animal-rights activists, (meta)human activists, Alamos 20K wannabes, Mexican heritage groups, and even a couple of more-Aztec-than-the-Aztecs outfits who think Aztlan has sold out (and tox, do those two groups *loathe* each other ...). Most of these groups are meaningless—good places to go if you want to get in an argument, but bad places to go if you want to change anything. I'm pretty fragging sure a couple of them maintain links with the rebels—*very* indirectly, of course—and a couple get behind terrorism for their own reasons (or for its own sweet sake, for all I know). In a nutshell, you've got reasoned academics, bomb-throwing whackos, and everything in between.

Nobody much cares, of course.

ELECTIONS

And *why* don't they care? (Now comes the fun part.) They don't care because candidates fielded by these fringe parties will never, *ever*, get elected to real government positions. End of line. (Okay, sure, they can and do get people into the national Chamber of Deputies. Whoopee drek. Sometimes I think the Chamber is just a way for Aztlan to keep all its cracked eggs in one basket, where it's easy to keep an eye on them.)

So why can't these guys get elected to anything meaningful? Because of the electoral system. It's the Next Great Step in democracy, or so everyone in government wants you to believe. The Aztlaner electoral system eliminates the typical representative democracy problem where a minority in a drekload of electoral ridings (or whatever) can elect someone to high office that

few people really want. (That's the problem with having an electoral college, or whatever the frag you call it.) The electronic, direct democracy, "Dial-a-Vote" system gets back to the old Greek (?) concept of one-man-one-vote-and-don't-jack-me-off-with-procedural drek. (Okay, sure, the system disenfranchises anyone without access to a computer or telecom or street-corner dataterm. But do you really want anyone that far out of the loop making meaningful decisions anyway?)

So, thanks to ORO Corp.—the direct ancestor of Aztechnology Corporation—Aztlan's got this whiz-bang drek-hot computerized voting system. From the comfort of your home—or your neighborhood tavern, or someone else's home—you can register your vote for each and every elected position with the slot of a credstick and the press of a couple of keys. At the speed of light all those votes wing their way to the central computer system, deep in the heart of the Aztechnology pyramid, where they're instantaneously tabulated.

And instantaneously manipulated. Oh sure, after every election Aztechnology publishes (electronically, of course) a "data trail"—an audit that lists exactly how many votes came from where and for who. (Doesn't tell you who voted for whom, of course, because that would defeat the purpose of the secret ballot.) But any system capable of manipulating and tweaking the data stream as it comes in will have no problem manipulating and tweaking the audit report afterward, *neh?* And that's exactly what happens. The results of each and every election are precisely what Aztechnology *wants* them to be. Talk about efficiency or what?

>>>>>(There's no external oversight? No watchdogs?)<<<<<
—Lindy Bop (17:57:06/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Of course there's oversight. Whaddaya think the Aztlaners are, peasants? Course, the oversight office is an accounting/consulting firm that just happens to be owned lock, stock and abacus by Aztechnology. Who watches these self-same watchers, or whatever?)<<<<<
—Hidalgo (23:41:18/5-10-56)

>>>>>(And nobody catches on?)<<<<<
—Lindy Bop (17:08:42/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Even if they do, what the frag are they going to do? How are they going to prove anything? And think about it. Even today—who knows why—people still believe that if something comes out of a computer, it's got to be stone graven truth. Am I right? Lots of Aztlaners, they know there's a data trail auditing each and every election, and that sets their little minds at ease. Frag, most of them will never so much as look at the audit report. But just knowing it's there—and knowing it came from an All-Knowing Computer—is all it takes.

Somebody else on Shadowland said it before, and I'll cop his riff. Maybe it's time for (meta)humanity to cack off and give the cockroaches their shot.)<<<<<
—Fox (01:42:30/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Oooh, I think I just might understand a run I was offered awhile back. Some Azzie Johnson tried to hire me to slip a virus into a particular node on the Aztechnology system. Did some deep digging and found out he had connections with PRI. I got interested and managed to get myself a copy of the virus he wanted me to plant. Didn't understand it worth a frag when I disassembled the code. Expected a combat virus of some kind, or something to open up a SAN to a decker, or that kind of same-old. Way I figured it, all this scrap of code could do was shave some kind of data-modification subroutine on an I/O port. A dedicated data dissemination port, the kind of thing you use to spam a message out to the Matrix at large. Didn't understand it and didn't want to fry my brain, so I told him to walk.

Now I'm getting a brainwave. If I'd planted that virus, would the next electronically published audit trail on an Azzie election have reported how people really voted, rather than the slicked up version?)<<<<<
—Whole-In-the-Wall (21:56:46/5-14-56)

NATIONAL MILITARY

>>>>>(We decided to cut to the chase and put this info where the troops usually show up in the real world—under the Aztechnology umbrella. See Corporate and National Military, p. 76 of the **Aztechnology** section of this post.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (12:19:50/5-1-56)

LANGUAGE

>>>>>(And finally, for those of you interested in the subject (which ought to be anyone contemplating doing biz in Aztlan—damned useful for undercover and illicit operations, languages—here's a little article I scammed from Compton's HyperMedia Encyclopedia, 2052 edition. Enjoy.)<<<<<
—Captain Chaos (08:02:07/5-02-56)

The official language of Aztlan is Aztlaner Spanish, a dialect of Spanish virtually identical to the language previously known as Mexican. The Aztlaner dialect has drifted a little further than Mexican from the original Castilian Spanish, virtually eliminating the subjunctive mood. All official activities, from government functions to the conduct of the justice system, take place in Aztlaner Spanish.

English is widely spoken and understood in Aztlan. In the most rural areas, however, only one or two people in a community may speak it fluently. Though the English language is not an official part of the curriculum for state schools, it is taught almost everywhere.

>>>>>(Most Azzies know enough English to get by. Whether they're willing to use it is another question entirely. It's this national pride drek, of course. A drekload of Azzies are still slotted off about the economic oppression of the American colonial era, even though it ended more than a century ago.)<<<<<
—Dartmouth (13:54:48/5-5-56)

>>>>>(Sounds like Québec.)<<<<<
—Winston (22.58:01/5-5-56)

>>>>>(Nowhere near as bad as that, trust me. Sure, a big macho Azzie slot might try to get up your nose by pretending he don't speak English, but just look around for a couple of minutes. You'll find someone to help you out. And in Aztlan, it ain't fragging illegal to talk to a government official in English. Worst that happens is the guy'll give you a blank stare. In Québec, he can bring you up on charges.)<<<<<
—Monitor Lizard (01:14:56/5-6-56)

MESOAMERIND LANGUAGES AND GROUPS

In addition to Aztlaner Spanish, a total of thirteen distinct Mesoamerind languages are spoken in different parts of the Aztlan nation, almost exclusively within distinct enclaves of native Mesoamerinds—the traditionals—in different areas. Most of Aztlan's traditional peoples live through subsistence farming. Those few who have become city dwellers have largely turned away from the traditions of their ancestors.

>>>>>(Ain't necessarily so, let me tell you that. Sure, they're rare, but some pure-blood traditionals are making good in the cities and still consider themselves Aztec (or whatever) instead of Aztlaner. If you try to tell them they've "turned away from the traditions of their ancestors," they'll flay the skin from your bones—either with a rusty knife, or with magic—because you've just dealt them the worst insult conceivable.)<<<<<
—Lingo (02.30:16/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Echo that. I been to Tenochtitlán; I seen 'em. Made me think of Seattle. Like in Seattle, you don't see many "unreconstructed" natives walking the streets in their traditional togs ... but you do see 'em sometimes.)<<<<<
—TwiceShy (21:14:19/5-9-56)

The most significant of the Mesoamerind groups still extant in modern Aztlan are the Aztec, Maya, Mixtec, and Tarascan.

Aztec

The most common Mesoamerind language spoken within Aztlan is *Nahuatl*, otherwise known as Aztec-Nahua (Uto-

Aztecan linguistic family). Priests of the Aztlan state religion speak *Nahuatl* when conducting their rituals.

Roughly one million Aztlan citizens can claim predominately Aztec "blood" or descent. Most of these live in the vicinity of Tenochtitlán. They are largely illiterate, and have only minimal ties with the Aztlaner culture.

>>>>>(Frag—racism everywhere you fragging turn!)<<<<<
—Catseye (02:30:42/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Personally, I'm kinda hesitant to call the truth "racist." The Aztecs still around today are largely subsistence farmers, and remain largely illiterate because they see no need to learn to read or write. They keep to themselves; they live and let live. If you could sling the lingo smoothly enought to ask, the largest percentage of the Aztecs would tell you proudly (not in these exact words, of course) that they live as they do in order to preserve the integrity of their ancestral lifestyle—they live that way by choice. Sorry if that offends your delicate sensibilities, but it just happens to be reality.

One more thing. The Tenochtitlán-region Aztecs don't seem to care that the Catholic Church is suppressed in Aztlan. These johnnies still follow their weird mixture of Roman Catholic and ancient Aztec beliefs, and don't give a frag that it happens to be illegal)<<<<<
—Holly (10:57:09/5-10-56)

Maya

The Mayan tongue, also known as *Yucatec*, is still spoken by a total of perhaps two million people living on the Yucatán peninsula and in the former states of Guatemala and Belize.

>>>>>(That figure comprises a drekload of different languages/dialects under the "superstock" classification of "Mayan." So in that sense, the encyclopedia's got it wrong. According to my research, maybe half a million people speak *Yucatec*. The other million-and-a-half speak related "Mayan-class" languages like Mam, Huastec, Chañabal, Chol, Chontal, Chorti, Chuj, Jacaltec, Motozintlec, Tzental, Tzotzil, Kekchi, Pokomam, Pokonchi, Cakchiquel, Quiché, Tzutuhil, Uspantec, Aguacatec, Ixil ... and a few more I've probably forgotten.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (23:57:07/5-7-56)

The various Mayan groups make up the majority of the "peasant" socioeconomic stratum in the Yucatán-Guatemala region.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] So is the civil war a Mayan versus Aztec cultural clash? This says most of the people in the Yucatán are of Mayan descent.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] It is not a cultural war, though I have seen undertones of those feelings at times.

Mixtec

The Mixtec people, dwelling in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla, speak the Mixtecan tongue, part of the Oto-Manguan linguistic family. Relatively few people who officially classify themselves as Mixtec are alive today. Despite their low numbers, however, they are disproportionately well-represented in the realm of art. Mixtec craftsmen and artists are renowned for metal- and stonework, as well as polychromatic pottery.

>>>>>(It's kind of slick to see artistic cross-pollination between cultural groups. The Mixtec, for example, typically keep to themselves (like most Mesoamerind groups, come to think of it); they pretend they're still living in the ninth century CE and that Aztlan is just a bad dream. Retro primitives living in denial? Not exactly. Take a look at some of the pottery being turned out in these tiny little villages in Oaxaca state, and you'll see they're using high-tech multiphase glazes, real cutting-edge drek. Stunningly beautiful, and staggeringly sophisticated. Like I say, I love cross-pollination.)<<<<<
—Maggie May (02:32:48/5-9-56)

Tarascan

The Tarascan group speaks a language of the same name that constitutes a distinct linguistic stock; Tarascan is unrelated to any other language. Contemporary Tarascan, thought to be less than a quarter-million of Aztlan's population, live in Michoacan State in the highlands southwest of Tenochtitlán. They are disproportionately influential in music. Over the past two centuries, Tarascan music has strongly influenced popular Mexican folk music, and Tarascan influences still can be heard in popular Aztlaner music.

>>>>>(You can hear Tarascan melodic and rhythmic influences in Azzie techno-glam, if you listen for it.)<<<<<
—Synthaxe (09:15:13/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Who'd fragging want to ... ?)<<<<<
—Babycakes (17:09:48/5-11-56)

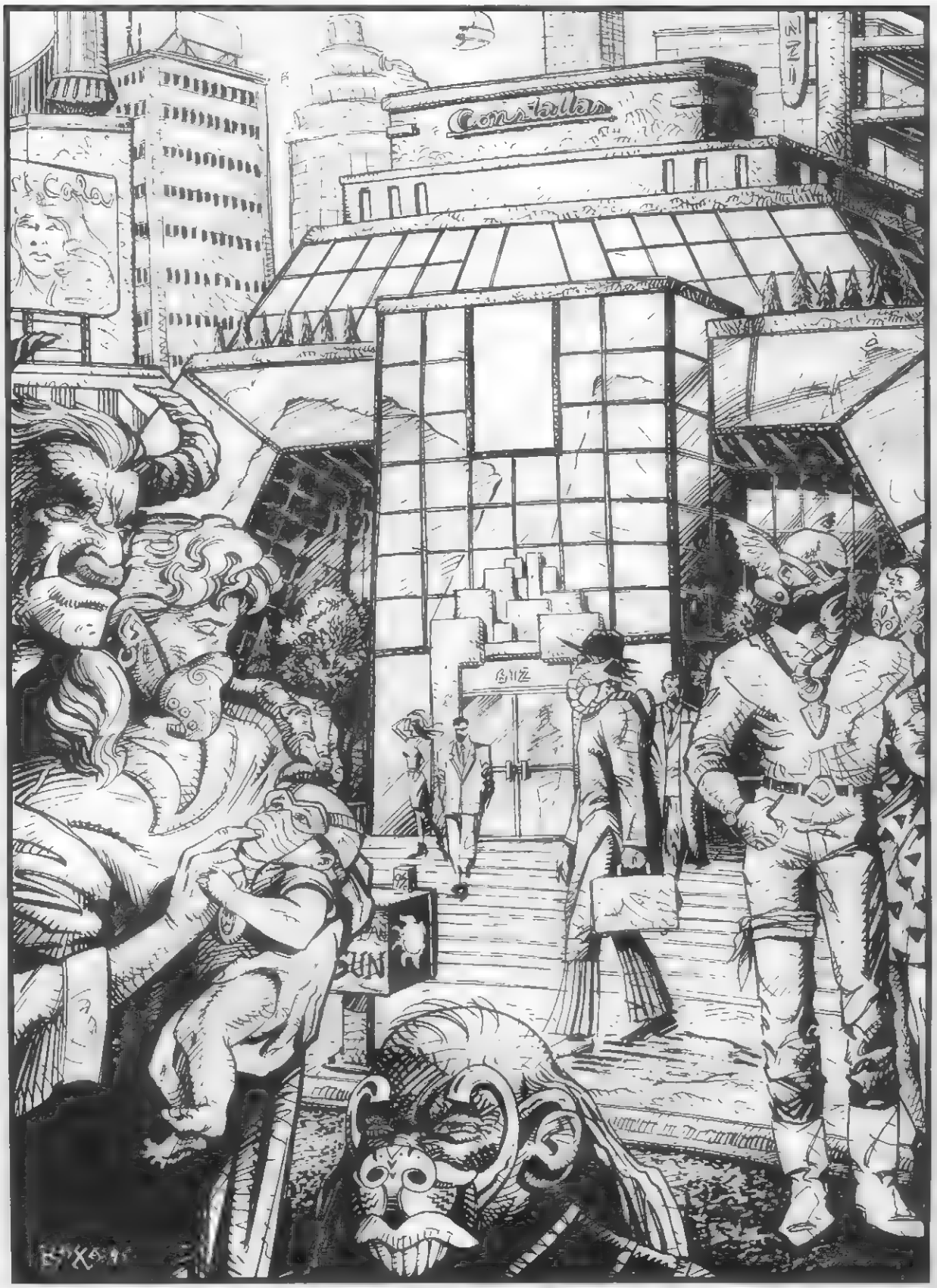
>>>>>(There's a movement in Aztlan almost as popular as electric-Celtic was (Boiled In Lead, Culture Vulture, the Pogues, bands like that) before the turn of the century. They're updating Tarascan for the masses. Best example I can think of is the band called Mariposa ("Butterfly").)<<<<<
—Synthaxe (08:57:33/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Mariposa *blows*, chummer. It *nibbles*. That's Tarascan? "Trashcan" is more fragging like it!)<<<<<
—Babycakes (15:45:20/5-12-56)

TENOCHTITLÁN

>>>>>(And again, my friends, I give you the gift of expected-though-nearly-meaningless numbers. As before, I copped much of what follows from the good Dr. Danchekker™. Enjoy. Apart from the numbers, a few cobbers from Shadowland chipped in their coupla nuyen. As always, don't assume eveything you read in here is necessarily still true or exactly the same.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (15:00:49/5-1-56)


Constellation
SUN

VITAL STATISTICS

Population: 17,766,900
- Human: 65%
- Elf: 15%
- Dwarf: 7%
- Ork: 9%
- Troll: 1%
- Other: 3%

Density in Populated Districts: 490 per square kilometer
Per Capita Income: 19,200,000 pesos
Below Poverty Level: 30%
On Fortune's Active Traders List: 4%
Megacorporate Affiliation: 66%
Felonious Crime Rate: 15 per 1,000 per annum
Education:
- High School Equivalency: 34%
- College Equivalency: 31%
- Advanced Studies Certificates: 17%

Hospitals: 75

>>>>>(Chummers, take note. Overall population, demographic breakdown, per capita income, poverty level drek, megacorp affiliation ... none of them include the SINless hordes.)<<<<<
—Auntie Social (17:35:09/5-12-56)

>>>>>(Chummerinos, take note. Tenochtitlán has an average altitude of over 3,000 meters (10,000 feet)! And that makes a big difference to you if you ain't a local. Anybody here buzzed down Denver way and had difficulty breathing, sleeping, and generally enjoying life? Tenochtitlán's way worse. You've been warned.)<<<<<
—Tozer (01:02:39/5-16-56)

GOVERNMENT

The civic government of Tenochtitlán includes the mayor and six members of the City Council. The mayor is appointed by the governor of the *Distrito Federal* in which the city lies, for up to three consecutive four-year terms. The council members are elected by direct electronic ballot for up to four three-year terms. The mayor acts as the chairperson of the City Council, but can cast a vote to break a tie. The mayor can also propose resolutions to be brought before the council.

>>>>>(Bottom line? Aztechnology has its vise-like hand firmly around the collective throat of the city. The mayor's an appointee (how democratic!), appointed by another appointee (the governor of the Federal District), who is in turn appointed by the prez. And we all know the prez is Aztechnology's lapdog.

As for the "democratically elected" councilors ... tox. Aztechnology could elect Bozo the fragging Clown to the City Council and keep him in for 12 years, and the electorate couldn't do squat about it.)<<<<<
—Sydney (22:46:18/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Your point? Chummer, name me one city where the civic government isn't at least somewhat corrupt.)<<<<<
—Klerk (23.54:22/5-11-56)

The current mayor of Tenochtitlán is Simon Xaltepec, reappointed for his third and final term in 2054.

>>>>>(Shouldn't come as a surprise to learn that Xaltepec is a retired Aztechnology wageslave.)<<<<<
—Jimcrack (17:31:46/5-7-56)

>>>>>(PRECINCTS

Hoi. Just so's you don't think I'm slacking off these days, here are the major precincts of Tenochtitlán plus each one's socioeconomic law-enforcement levels. I've limited my list to "neighborhoods" in the real bleeding heart of Tenochtitlán. (That place is so fragging big ...)

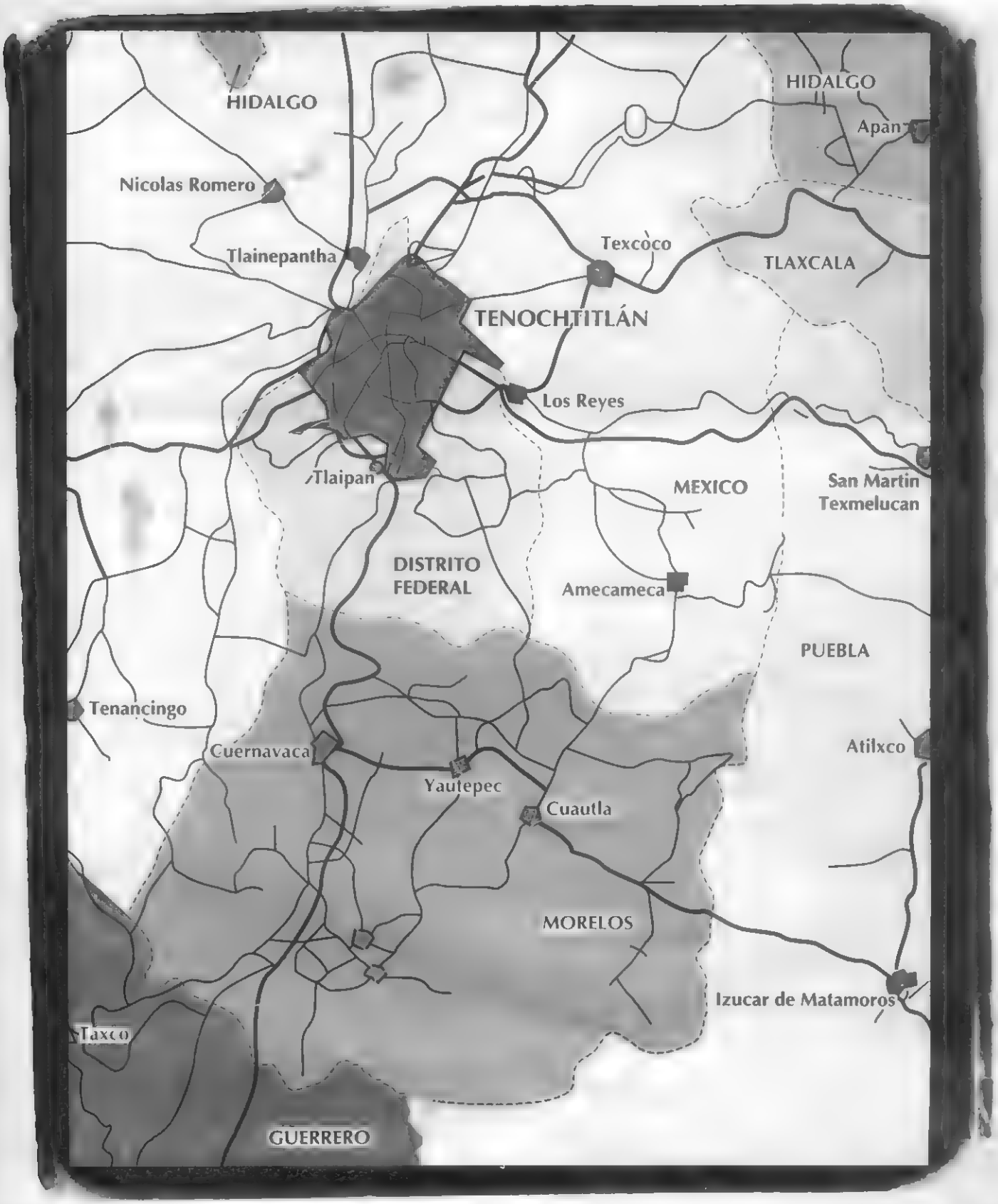
CENTRAL TENOCHTITLÁN

Precinct	Security Rating
Alvaro Obregon: Middle Class	A–B
Azcapotzalco: Lower Class	C–D
Benito Juarez: Upper Class	AA
Coyoacan: Middle Class	B
Cuajimalpa de Morelos: Lower Class	D
Cuauhtemoc: Luxury Class	AAA–AA
Gustavo A. Madero: Middle Class	B–C
Iztacalco: Lower Class	C–D
Iztapalapa: Lower Class	C
Magdalena Contreras: Upper Class	AA
Miguel Hidalgo: Middle Class	B
Tlahuac: Upper Class	AA–A
Tlalpan: Middle Class	A
Venustiano Carranza: Luxury Class	AA
Xochimilco: Middle Class	A–B

You'll note there aren't any real squatter-class areas on the list. There's plenty of them once you head out toward the burbs, trust me.)<<<<<
—SPD (09:11:52/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Priyatel, I may be getting on in years, but my memory's not that far shot. I lived in Mexico City back in 2003, and you're way off-beam on some of those areas. Hell, my folks had a real nice penthouse in a place you lay out as "lower class.")<<<<<
—Deborah (18:25.45/5-8-56)

>>>>>(You're probably right, Deborah, I don't doubt it for a moment. But there's been a lot of (polluted) water under that bridge. VITAS, the "Terror Time," the burning, the fall of the government, and on and on. Hey, girl, I can remember when Green Lake used to be a real nice, quiet place to raise a family. Now it's a shooting gallery.)<<<<<
—SPD (09:10:44/5-10-56)


HIDALGO
HIDALGO
Apan
Nicolas Romero
Tlainepantha
Texcòco
TLAXCALA
TENOCHTITLÁN
Los Reyes
Tlaipan
MEXICO
San Martin
Texmelucan
DISTRITO
FEDERAL
Amecameca
PUEBLA
Tenancingo
Cuernavaca
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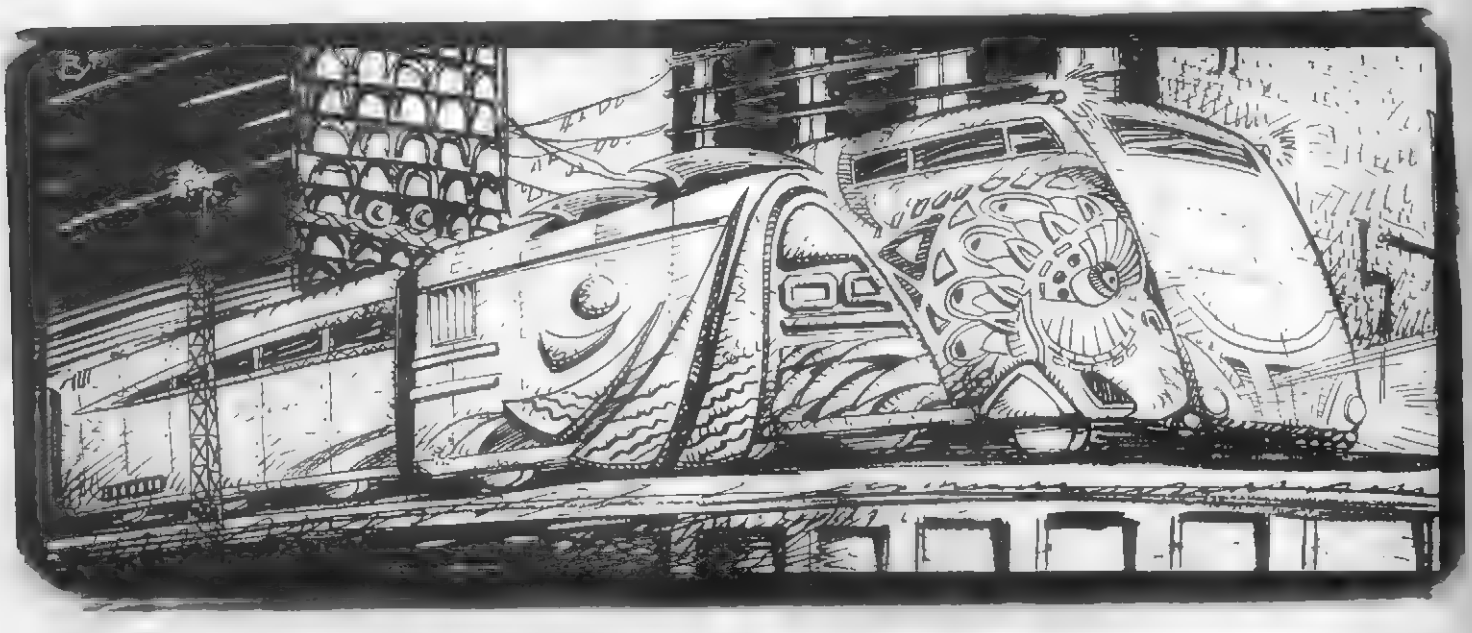
Izucar de Matamoros
Taxco
GUERRERO



>>>>>(That's an important distinction to keep in mind. Modern Tenochtitlán is different from old-days Mexico City. I was just looking at some satellite images I downloaded off the Matrix: Mexico City around the turn of the century and Tenochtitlán a couple of years ago. In terms of layout and many of the details you'll see from a (nonclassified) satellite scan, the two images look similar But when you actually get into the city, you realize how deceiving appearances are. This megalopolis has changed more than Seattle has over the last 60 years.)<<<<<

—Ding (16:48:22/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Who's saying Seattle hasn't changed ?)<<<<<

—Old-Timer (09:28:57/5-12-56)

GETTING AROUND TENOCHTITLÁN

Car, bus, monorail and short-hop air travel are the best bets for traveling around the immense city of Tenochtitlán.

BY CAR

Tenochtitlán is the archetypal "multilevel" city. Superhighways (typically called "autoroutes") crisscross the city, elevated on stanchions above major surface routes. On the sweeping "overroutes," one can cross the entire city without ever descending to ground level.

All major overroutes and surface streets have international-standard GridGuide hardware installed.

>>>>>(The hardware is international-standard, but the software—chummers, I think Tenochtitlán is running on some obsolete version. Primitive functions are supported, but there's some major incompatibilities if you try anything tricky. Like, drop into the standard local circuit for the Cuauhtemoc loop, and then punch in a priority diversion to Xochimilco. You'll be lucky if the GridGuide system doesn't route you into a ferrocrete divider at 200 kph.)<<<<<

—Hauka (08:04:26/5-9-56)

>>>>>("Divergent evolution" is what that song's called. Twenty years back, when Tenochtitlán first installed GridGuide, odds are it would have been completely compatible with the Seattle-style system. (Of course it would have, both systems were fully CCITT Q.405-compliant.) Since then? Both Seattle and Tenochtitlán decided to take the international standard and "evolve" it—in totally different directions.

Run a Tenochtitlán-built car on Tenochtitlán GridGuide, you're not going to have any problem. Likewise, a Seattle-built car on Seattle GridGuide highways.

Try to drive a Seattle-built car on Tenochtitlán highways? No drek, you're going to have problems. And vice versa.)<<<<<

—Henry IV (26:05:17/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Ever tried to drive through Tenochtitlán without GridGuide? No? My advice to you, my friends, is keep it that way. Imagine driving along Autoroute 85 southbound, the big overroute built over the top of Avenida Insurgentes Norte. You come screaming down from Santa Maria Tulpetlac northeast of downtown, going like a bat out of hell, in traffic tighter-packed than some parking lots I've seen. South of SMT, the autoroute's six lanes southbound, six lanes northbound

Don't know about you, chummers, but I like to drive fast. But frag, compared to Tenochtitlán drivers I'm a granny in a '95 Valiant out for a Sunday spin. So I'm hanging in the slow lane—seems like the safest place to be.

Except it isn't. One moment I'm hauling hoop at 180 klicks. The next—"Right Lane Exit Only," offramp, boom, I'm lost in the surface streets. Twenty minutes to find my way back onto the autoroute

Well, I'm not going to make the same mistake twice. Taking my guts in my hands, I jag on over to the fast lane. At least here I won't get funneled off into some little residential neighborhood, right? Wrong. "Left Lane Exit Only," offramp, boom, back into those hoopfrag little surface streets. Another twenty minutes to find my way back onto the autoroute. Sigh.

So this time I've got it chipped. Hang out in the fragging middle lane! Sure, traffic on both sides is closing me in, but at least I get to stay on the autoroute this time, right? Wrong. "Center Two Lanes Exit Only," offramp—straight down, like a ski jump—boom, back visiting José and Carmelita in their little burb neighborhood.

I hate driving in Tenochtitlán. And don't get me started on the parking situation ...)<<<<<

—Renata (14:09:59/5-12-56)

>>>>>(That's a good point, Renata. Parking downtown is a cast-iron slitch, particularly if you're on the shadowy side of the line. There's next to nothing in the way of street parking in the downtown core. Underground parkades everywhere, but they're expensive as all hell. You're looking at 3,000 pesos per half-hour or portion—6 nuyen per half-hour, with no daily maximum. Adds up right quick.

Also, none of the parking systems accept hard currency. None. You've got to slot your credstick to get into the parkade and then again to get your car out of hock. It's gotta be a personal credstick, too, with ident data that matches the barcode on your car. Better much to take the fragging bus.)<<<<<

—Dilbert (10:05:45/5-13-56)

BY BUS

The *Autobús* service in Tenochtitlán is reliable and efficient. Major routes crisscross the city, and express buses link to the outlying suburbs and "bedroom" communities beyond the city core. Predictably, the system is entirely automated, operating off the installed GridGuide hardware in the road surfaces.

For rate purposes, the city is divided into zones. Travel within a single zone costs 1,000 pesos (1,200 pesos during peak periods). Two-zone fares (from one zone to an immediately contiguous zone) are 1,800 pesos (2,000 peak); three-zone fares are 2,200 pesos (2,500 peak).

>>>>>(Fare zones equate pretty closely to the "precincts" I listed earlier.)<<<<<

—SPD (09:16:22/5-8-56)

>>>>>(You can pay bus fares with hard currency.)<<<<<

>>>>>(And if the bus greases some ped during a false alarm, you can add Murder 2 to the tab.)<<<<<

—Uncle Bob (04:10:26/5-9-56)

BY MONORAIL

Tenochtitlán has a well-developed monorail system, offering yet another alternative to private cars. The monorail lines follow the right-of-ways established before the turn of the century for grade-level train tracks. The monorail lines are elevated, however, with "special access" roads running beneath them. These special access roads are restricted to law enforcement, fire, and other emergency vehicles.

>>>>>(Which makes them wiz for a quick getaway—no traffic!)<<<<<

—Miki (11:02:38/5-7-56)

>>>>>(No traffic, true ... but surveillance cameras mounted on every third monorail stanchion. Ergo, the cops know exactly where you are every second you're on the special access roads, making it a no-brainer to set up roadblocks to ruin your whole day. Better to play in traffic, if you ask me.)<<<<<

—Blackett (04:23:46/5-8-56)

The monorail uses standard maglev technology familiar to residents of Tokyo, Bangkok and Seattle. Fares vary depending on route, distance traveled, and time of day, typically ranging from 500 pesos to 4,000 pesos.

>>>>>(Hey. No subway system? Tenochtitlán would be a natural for something like that.)<<<<<

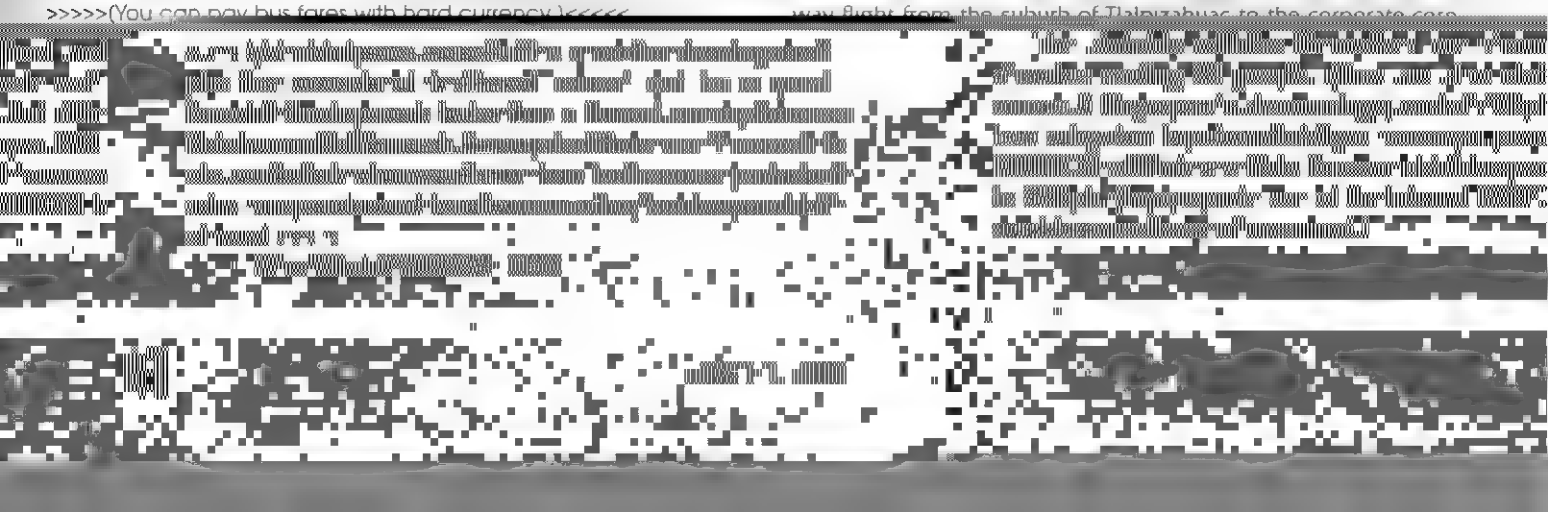
—Gorod (11:15:52/5-11-56)

>>>>>(It would if the whole city wasn't built on soft ground. Frag, in some places the ground is so soft that the area's subsiding by up to 6 meters—and that's after all the work the government put into countering the subsidence problem back in the '20s. Not exactly ideal conditions for a subway system.)<<<<<

—Webster (17:37:15/5-11-56)

BY SHORT-HOP (MARIPOSA)

Air Montezuma operates regularly scheduled Mariposa ("butterfly") short-hop air links within Greater Tenochtitlán. Using small V/STOL-profile craft such as the Osprey II, Mariposa flights link the major suburban hubs to the downtown core. Much more expensive than the bus but much more efficient, a typical one-



TENOCHTITLÁN SURVIVAL GUIDE

Hoi, chummers. (Note clever title, traditional greeting. Am true shadowrunner, no?) This, my friends, is a command performance. You guessed it: the Great SysOp asks for additional material, NiteSpawn trembles and obeys. (I offer many obsequious gestures to our most esteemed Captain. In my vision, he thumps me on the head with a comradely, "Quit fooling around and tell these people what to expect when they hit the streets of this foreign nation. People and places are all well and good, but how can our runners avoid looking like tourists, or even worse, like shadowtypes up to their usual complement of no good?") So I'll tell you what I know, but it's only what *I* know, got it?

I know you'd like to hear a nice, simple rule of thumb for Tenochtitlán. (Frag, that's what the Good Captain asked me to post here.) The problem is, just about any generalization I make about Tenochtitlán other than the absolutely facile, "It's *big*" is going to be wrong as often as right.

Come to think of it, that's a pretty accurate way to capsulate Tenochtitlán right there: "Expect the unexpected."

STREET SCENE

What's it like on the streets of Tenochtitlán? Short answer: kinda what life is like on the streets of Seattle ... even *more* so.

Los Humo Grande

Case in point: take the pollution, please. Yeah, sure, Seattle's polluted, ya betcha. But it's a fragging untouched sylvan paradise compared to the Big Smoke—the locals tag it *Los Humo Grande*. Go outside your Seattle flop and take a good, deep breath of city air. Hurts, doesn't it? Burns your throat and your lungs. Hey, no wonder Fellini-Med does such hot biz with its breathers, *neh?* Now, go outside your *departamento* in Tenochtitlán and do the same—take a nice, big, chest-busting breath. When you regain consciousness, smile at the nurses at the local emergency ward. Tell 'em I said "hoi."

I mean, let's talk parts per million (ppm) here. When it comes to the level of toxics, particulates, corrosives, carcinogens, mutagens, and all the other nasties you can name in the air, if Tenochtitlán isn't the global champ, then it's definitely in the top five. As a point of comparison, Seattle ranks in the pale median for international metroplexes.

>>>>>(There're places worse than Tenochtitlán?)<<<<<
—Low Ranger (13:46:06/5-8-56)

>>>>>(Guess you haven't visited the Soviet (Dis)Union lately, huh?)<<<<<
—Raiko (00:52:27/5-10-56)

Los Humo Grande is why everyone—*everyone*—wears breathers on the streets, chummers. As should we all. Hey, breathers are cheaper than biotech filters, and they're a *frag* of a lot cheaper than the full nose-throat-and-lungs job you'll need after you've burned out your mucous membranes. Even if your throat happens to be moly-steel and your lungs equipped with micron filters, wear a breather anyway—that way you won't stand out like a sore fragging joint on the streets. What kind of breather should I wear, you ask? See my comments under Fashion (how's that for a fraggin' weird juxtaposition of subjects!).

>>>>>(Concur. Going out on the streets of Tenochtitlán without a breather is like wearing a big sign: "Too dumb to live, or too chromed to die." Don't know about you, omae, but I prefer a lower profile. When in Rome drekcetera, neh?)<<<<<
—Wolverine (02:47:58/5-12-56)

The Buzz

Tenochtitlán's a *city*, kapeesh? Bigger than most, but still a city. In most ways, walking the Tenochtitlán street "feels" like being out on the bricks of any other metroplex.

Here's the thing. Aztlan is one big scary place. Other headbangers on this board have made that mondo clear, *neh?* But when you step out of your personal hidey hole, what should you expect? Transylvania on the night of the full moon, right? Dark, depressing, paranoid, trembling with barely repressed violence.

nasty juju waiting around every corner ready to eat your soul, locals scurrying from doorway to doorway minimizing their exposure, everyone too scared to talk to each other let alone to a foreign shadowrunner ...

Uh-uh. To be scared by something, you have to know it exists *and* you have to admit to yourself that it exists. That second thing's the big stumbling block for most people, I figure. Take your average Aztlaner-on-the-street. Does he know he should be scared? Null, omae. What does the slub-on-the-street know or care about potential magical corruption in the government, oppression of "unsanctioned" religions, genocidal wars, freako blood magic, corporate backstabbing on an epic scale, and all that other nasty, nasty drek? Nothing, when you get right down to it. Hey, if Mr. Average Slub is a Roman Catholic or Jesuit or a traditional, maybe he gets his bowels in a knot about the state of the state he lives in. But he isn't, and that's all she wrote.

What does matter to your typical citizen, be he Aztlaner, UCASan or whatever? He's only concerned about what affects his personal life. Mr. Average asks the really burning questions of the day. Do I get to take home a reasonable percentage of what I make, or do taxes gouge me too deep? Do I feel safe walking the streets and in my home? Are the streets clean? Does my garbage get picked up regularly? Do the trains run on time? Are there lots of consumer gewgaws to blow my cred on? Is there something good on the trid, or is it reruns with nuked stuffers *again*? And how's the local soccer team doing? These are the things that matter.

Says our friend José, "Hey, corrupt government? Can't be, chummer—don't you know that we've got a free democratic system? And hey—don't bother me with all the rest of that claptrap; you've obviously mistaken me for someone who gives a frag." Scan me?

>>>>>(Bread and circuses, chummer—that's what you mean to say. The Romans figured that out two millennia ago, and not much has changed since. Keep the populace fed, and keep 'em entertained. Bread and circuses, Stuffer Shacks and trideo; burritos and *ollamaliztli*; chimichangas and the occasional execution. As long as the people don't get hungry or bored, you can fleece 'em all you like.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (01:33:57/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Fleece, that's the word. Like sheep.)<<<<<

—Marginal Intelligence (11:46:52/5-11-56)

>>>>>(You got it, MI. Complacent, technologically satiated sheep. Like our friend said, "Just like Seattle, but more so.")<<<<<

—Bilbo (09:12:45/5-12-56)

>>>>>(And nobody's bothered to tell them the ugly truth? Cut me slack.)<<<<<

—Jerky Boy (21:57:00/5-12-56)

>>>>>(People have tried. The Vatican's tried, the Jesuits have tried, the rebels have tried, International Inquirer and "A Hard Affair" have tried. No success, overall. Why? Not just because the fine folks at Aztechnology are doing their fragging best to shut down The Truth (which they are, trust me). Because your typical Azzie-on-the-street just doesn't want to know. That's why.)<<<<<

—Halcyon (19:47:23/5-13-56)

Corporate Sector

Ever been to the Azzie Sector of the Front Range Free Zone? If you have, you've already seen the corp sector of Tenochtitlán.

>>>>>(Um ... query: "Corporate Sector"?)<<<<<

—Radio Joe (02:46:42/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Deepest darkest downtown-land. Within a klick or two of the Zócalo and the Azzie HQ.)<<<<<

—Ghost (09:11:00/5-10-56)

Lots of ever-so-busy people on the streets, all your hard-bitten corp-types scurrying off to do whatever job Big Brother Aztechnology wants them hopping on today. You'll see very few street people or gutter-types ... at least, nobody who *dresses* that way. Big, big *Policía* presence, and the hardboys seem to get real juiced from running off—or running *in*—any slub who looks like he doesn't belong. Hey, even the streets here are squeaky *clean*. (Acid-scoured, maybe, but clean.)

So what does the corp sector feel like? The underlying buzz is *productivity*, chummer. Everyone's being so fragging productive it makes *my* ass tired. Little knots of sararimen engaged in earnest discussion. Middle managers yattering into cell-phones, or zoning out while they're jacked into a portacomp. People walk fast and look like they know where they're going.

>>>>>(Let's not forget that sense of quiet desperation so strong that you can smell it. Productivity's the key, but you can almost see the word balloons above the suits' heads that ask, "Am I being productive enough?" There're ulcers popping out all over.)<<<<<

—Microtome (07:52:58/5-13-56)

Best way to stand out? Dress like a yokel or street animal and rubberneck a lot. That will guarantee that the *Policía* will pay close attention to your every move—and not so that they can protect you, the apparently innocent bystander and disposable-income-spending tourist, from unsavory elements, believe you me. Best way to fit in? Dress like a corp up-and-comer, walk briskly, and ignore your surroundings like you're concentrating on refining the marketing plan for Next Year's Model.

Since part of fitting in is carrying the right accessories, let's talk toys for a moment—specifically, weapons and armor. Like somebody else said earlier in this metafile, you can legally pack *much* heavier bang-bangs in Aztlan than you can anywhere else in the civilized world. You can wear medium personal armor into restaurants and bars and fail to earn even a glance, let alone a second glance. Sounds like a lawbreaker's paradise and a *very* dangerous place to hang, huh?

Null. It may sound hinky, but I gotta say I feel safer on the streets of downtown Tenochtitlán than I do jandering around Seattle or (spirits save my soul) Chicago. Yes, Virginia, even with all that heavy ordnance just walking around. Why? Because only real loserheads ever dare use their lethal little toys. The *Policía* (read: Aztechnology Corporate Security) assume everyone's carrying everything the law allows, and load themselves up to the point that they're well capable of handling all problems that can arise. Your typical Azzie cop-on-the-street is armed for bear, and suffers no qualms about proving his readiness in the most efficacious way possible ... and then reloading.

>>>>>(Stress that again, chummers. If you do get cranky and haul out your gat in downtown Tenochtitlán, the cops in the vicinity will cut you down quicker than thought. No shouted warning, no "moderate force," it's a straightforward case of BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM-BAM-Freeze! Remember, in Az, a bunch of those rights that UCASans consider inalienable are actually optional. You have the right to remain dead. You have the right to an undertaker. If you are unable to afford one, an undertaker will be assigned to you. Etc.)<<<<<

—Denver Bob (04:49:08/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Let's address the subject of cops. The locals call them the *Policía*, but they're basically ACS hard men.

Typical patrol vehicle is a local variant on the COP-One that graces the streets of Seattle. If you scope things out for awhile, you'll notice they come in different colors. Most of the patrol cars are beige, some are darker brown, some are a kinda muddy green, and some are black. Roughly speaking, the car color denotes the level of hardware the cops inside are packing. Beige is your typical street cop (Azzie style, of course). Brown is similar to a Lone Star FRT or SWAT team. Green is one step up from that. And black is death, chummers—mil-spec all the way, trained and eager to put their toys to use.

Remember, I'm speaking in generalities here. Don't bet your life on the color-code rule of thumb. I've seen a plain-Jane beige COP-One disgorge a team of full-on special-forces commandos. I figure the Azzies switch it all up once in a while just to keep us all on our toes.)<<<<<

—Argent (08:46:15/5-12-56)

You've gotta understand that my comfort zone has exceptions, even downtown in the core of the city. I don't suggest going for a midnight stroll through the Alameda Central, for example, unless you're looking for a little jaggedy-edged action. The park is a bad scene when the sun goes down, and apparently the *Policía* figure it just ain't worth the pain to clean it up much. There's probably other nasty little enclaves of violence lurking around that I haven't discovered yet ... most likely in just those places where you least want to find them—you know, the way the world typically seems to work.

The Burbs

What about the suburbs, you ask? Which burbs? There's something available for every taste. High-tone-high-security suit-land; tumbledown tenements where the devil rats feed better than the residents; and anything and everything in between. What they have in common is that they're all polluted as hell and more crowded than a Greyhound leaving Chicago after the Big One dropped (which causes its own problems, of course).

>>>>>(Hey, Tenochtitlán ain't got the market cornered on crowded, so stop being so fragging provincial. Check out Hong Kong sometime, or the Shinjuku district of Tokyo. Or, if you've got a strong stomach, downtown Calcutta. Gaak!)<<<<<

—Terna (10:09:28/5-17-56)

In general, you'll find that the frequency of police patrol and the overall level of law enforcement matches comparable zones of the Seattle sprawl. When the *Policía* actually show up on the scene, however, they're the same armed-to-the-teeth butt-kickers that show up to settle hash in the corporate core.

The predictable strength of response trickles down to the street in a drekload of ways. Aztlaners follow the same drill as most other metroplexes: the closer you live to the big boys (in this case, Aztechnology), the better protection you can expect (and the harsher the response to those foolish enough to break any kind of law). The safer neighborhoods are safer because somebody important cares; the bad 'hoods get that way because they're just not worth the money and time needed to make them safe.

In basic terms, the cops' heavy-duty firepower means that you've got to be just that bit more desperate to choose the hard option—you put more brainpower into stealth and research than you would in Seattle. But because you have been warned, if you *do* decide to go the hard route, you'll know to expect the boys in beige who come for you to be tricked out like an infantry fireteam—and you'll make your plans accordingly.

>>>>>(If I scan you right, then, you're saying there are fewer cases of resisting arrest—and most forms of violent crime, for that matter—but those cases that do occur are a lot more brutal. Neh?)<<<<<

—Vargas (23:35:06/5-10-56)

>>>>>(More or less. If you expect to hash it out with the cops, you'll arm yourself with enough heat to do the job.)<<<<<

—Laser's Edge (06:16:58/5-11-56)

FASHION

Hey, Tenochtitlán's as media-driven as any other sprawl on the face of the earth. Most people wear what the media tell 'em to wear: What's Hot This Season, what Nicky Saitoh and Faye Drummond and Sheena M and the other glamsters are wearing (or the closest we can *afford* to what the glamsters are wearing). Just like Seattle.

In fact, apart from allowances for climate, clothes that let you fit into your target group in Seattle will do the same for you

In Tenochtitlán. Cheapo synthleathers aren't too popular—unless you have a biz reason for wanting to sweat like a pig—but Aztechnology sells some real nice higher-grade synthleather that "breathes" a lot better than the cheapie drek. You've got to pay a *tad* more if you want to look chill, but hey—nobody said life was easy.

>>>>>(Aztechnology also peddles modified versions of form-fitting body armor and Securetech-style clothing. Design and functionality are exactly the same as the models offered by Ares and Kelmar Technologies, respectively. (As a matter of fact, both Ares and Kelmar are suing Aztechnology for infringement even as we speak.) The actual materials used are more porous, though, and much more comfortable on a hot, sticky Tenochtitlán summer day. Prices for these knockoffs are typically 10 percent more than what you'd pay for the original model.)<<<<<

—Maven (22:14:51/5-12-56)

There's one big difference between fashion here and elsewhere, of course: breathers. Because ecological conditions make them a necessity, breathers now belong to the world of fashion accessories. Styles and colors change with each season, and dedicated followers of fashion dutifully scramble to keep up with This Year's Model. Real hard-core clotheshorses always buy a dozen breathers in different styles and colors when the new models come out so that they can accessorize every outfit they wear.

>>>>>(It's the same fashion principle that launched eyeglasses into fad status 60 years ago. If you wanted to be stone chill, you had to have a set of specs to complement each outfit you wore. And you had to have the trendiest models, too—even if they weren't anywhere near as effective, optometrically speaking, as workaday pairs costing half as much.

Same thing in Tenochtitlán with breathers. How much does a typical Fellini-Med breather cost you in Seattle? About 350 nuyen, right? Pretty good price for a breather that rates at the top of the list for effectiveness.

Trouble is, in Tenochtitlán, Fellini-Med is way infra dig. Only yokels and know-nothings wear Fellini-Med. The model du jour comes from Alpes (yep, an Aztechnology subsidiary), costs nearly twice as much as Fellini-Med for the base model, and is 37 percent less effective. What price fashion, huh?

And it gets worse. High-tone corp poodles wouldn't be caught dead wearing base model Alpes filters. Only the top-tier stuff will do—the sculpted look studded with cubic zirconia and other drek. Top-of-the-line Alpes breathers cost 2,000 nuyen and up! And they're even less effective than the base models.)<<<<<

—Homeopath (00:14:48/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Who gives a frag? I ain't no fashion poodle.)<<<<<

—Talia (12:45:07/5-9-56)

>>>>>(... As anyone who knows you will attest, Talia my love.

Who gives a frag? Anyone who's trying to infiltrate the upper levels of Tenochtitlán society, that's who. You've got to look the part you're playing, and if that means sucking air through a 2K¥ breather that doesn't work worth squat, so be it.)<<<<<

—Lynx (22:56:56/5-10-56)

As a group, the traditionals seem completely immune to the whole fashion treadmill. Most of those chummers dress the way their ancestors dressed a century ago or more. Loose-fitting shirts and loose pants for men; smock-like dresses for women. Drek-kicked straw hats to keep the top of their heads from getting nuked. That's the height of traditional "counterfashion."

>>>>>(... Which means that's what you wear, if you're trying to infiltrate that level of society.)<<<<<

—Lynx (22:57:43/5-10-56)

ARCHITECTURE

Architecturally speaking, Tenochtitlán's a dog's breakfast. I guess that's to be expected in light of the city's history. It's painfully close to several geological faults, which means Tenochtitlán gets shaken to drek by an earthquake an average of once every ten years. The real gut-ripper quakes are less common, tearing apart the city only once every fifty or sixty years. When earthquakes hit, old drek falls down—it's a law of nature. Old drek falls down and often catches on fire. Call it seismically enforced urban renewal.

>>>>>(Don't forget the really big fire in 2010. That wiped out a goodly portion of the city right there.)<<<<<

—Staedtler (14:00:36/5-12-56)

And when old drek falls down and burns, someone (and never the same someone twice) gets to decide what replaces it. Just like most other sprawls, Tenochtitlán's got no overall urban plan. Which means when space becomes available, there's no predicting what's going to occupy it next: technoflash chrome-spires, skyrakers, pseudo-retro drek, historically accurate "traditional architecture," or bits and pieces of building styles from all over the world melded into a single structure (some times more successfully than others).

Just stroll around the city. You'll see cutting-edge skyrakers rubbing shoulders with structures built in the ancient Aztec style, across the street from adobe-and-red-tile kitsch and Mission-style retro (but fifty-five stories tall!). Hey, there's even some *really* old stuff that was built in and actually survived from the last century. But unless you're an expert, you're not going to be able to distinguish the real McCoy from the knockoffs.

Chummers, I've spent my share of time in Tenochtitlán, and the truly random nature of the place still makes my head spin. It's like the Great Urban Planner Himself broke the city up into little bits, put it all into His kit-bag, shook it all up, poured it out again and let it lay the way it fell. There's only three ways to move through the city without ending up hopelessly lost every time: study your maps extra hard, get a current knowsoft, or hire a guide. The maps and the knowsofts serve the purpose up to a point, but only a native can get you to the kind of places that run-

ners love best. I always go with a guide. Now, I consider myself a fairly savvy judge of character, but I got burned twice by apparently honest guides. Hey—you've got to admit these were more clever than most—rather than leading me into your typical beat-up-the-tourist-and-steal-his-stuff ambush on the first trip out, they treated me right twice and three times, respectively, before pulling the scam. I guess the message I left on the corpse of the first guide didn't make the rounds right away, but my current guide assures me that the entire underworld understood the second message perfectly.

While the frequent earthquakes have allowed the city administrators (such as they are) to create a mishmash of the city's architectural style, seismic activity has forced the government to reinforce practically everything in an effort to preserve a few more of the existing buildings and other structures with every quake. Check out the autoroute overpasses in downtown Tenochtitlán, for example. They're way beefier than the I-5 Interchanges Seattlites know and love (and occasionally sleep beneath), built with all kinds of shock-absorption tech.

>>>>>(Which doesn't seem to work worth drek.)<<<<<
—Barnard (13:34:57/5-10-56)

You'll also see obvious signs of a high degree of ... well, I guess you could call it "civil defense preparedness"—precautions taken to minimize the damage of the *next* Big One. Evacuation plans, hardened shelters, more fire stations per capita than in any other city I've ever visited, drekcetera.

>>>>>(Appearances can be deceiving. Far as any expert can tell, this civil defense preparedness is just window-dressing. Tenochtitlán's still as vulnerable to a big shake as Seattle, all appearances to the contrary.)<<<<<
—Barnard (13:36:02/5-10-56)

COMMUNICATIONS

In the corporate core, Tenochtitlán represents the archetype of "wired society." Every building, every public phone booth, every public data terminal is connected by high-bandwidth fiber-optic links to the LTG and the Matrix. Deckers take note: Tenochtitlán is one of the few cities in the world where you can run a full-on cyberdeck over a public-access phone line without any degradation in performance. In the corporate core, phone/data booths are everywhere: clean, functional, well-lit ... even marginally hardened. (If somebody starts trying to bust caps up your hoop, you can do *much* worse than take shelter in a phone booth.) Cellular coverage is reliable, with no "blind spots," and most cells can handle high-bandwidth applications.

>>>>>(A place tailor-made for deckers, neh?)<<<<<
—Juju (15:42:18/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Yeah. Too bad that all those ever-so-wiz phone/data/cell channels are monitored by Aztechnology, huh?)<<<<<
—Red Wraith (02:23:42/5-10-56)

>>>>>(The Ghostly One's right. Sure, the Azzie spooks can't monitor every dataline all the time, even with heavy-duty computer support. But you can bet your rosy hoop that they do pay special attention to all phone/data calls that use the high bandwidths—and that means you.)<<<<<
—FastJack (19:32:37/5-10-56)

Out in the burbs, we may speak gently and say that service becomes somewhat problematic. Upper-class areas get upper-class service. Lower-class areas get whatever's left. Generally, those way-chill high-bandwidth phone booths don't take up space on any corners outside the corp core.

>>>>>(Lordy, I made the mistake of trying to use the land-line phone system in Nezahualcoyotl, out Iztapalapa way. (For those who don't know, Neza is a hellhole of squatter-class hovels in the midst of an otherwise lower-class region.) The phone lines were so noisy I had to use dampers just to understand the recorded voice telling me my call couldn't get through. Outside the core, do not trust your lives to the phone system.)<<<<<
—Marcus (00:21:21/5-11-56)

EMERGENCY SERVICES

As we have all agreed is true many times, the government of Aztlan takes care of its own (which means, once again, that the gov-boys take care of the Azzie corpers). Emergency services are no exception. In the corporate core, you see ample evidence of the existence of well-equipped, well-trained, and all that drek emergency services. Every phone/data booth contains a PANICBUTTON that is direct-linked to the local *Policía*, fire department (an Aztechnology subsidiary, predictably), and Medicarro. The Azzies have also put stand-alone PANICBUTTON boxes at most major intersections. Emergency response is bloody quick in the core.

Outside the core? Ranges from much less efficient to you're calling from where? (wild laughter ensues). Sure, all phone booths have a PANICBUTTON installed, but in the lower-class parts of town it's hard to find an intact phone booth. You're far better off paying for the service and wearing your own button than leaving a bright red trail on street after street as you search for a functional, government-provided PANICBUTTON.

>>>>>(Also, the PANICBUTTON network uses the LTG. If I punched the button in Neza, for example, it's only even money the call would get through at all.)<<<<<
—Marcus (00:23:03/5-11-56)

SOCIAL SERVICES

Social services are handled by two distinct organizations: the Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Social Security Institute. The former handles public-health issues, while the latter takes care of welfare, low-cost housing, medical care for the poor, and all that other warm-and-fuzzy claptrap. (Just to answer the eternal question before it makes its appearance on the net: no, you won't ever get to use these services yourself. But infor-

mation is most definitely ammunition when it comes to surviving in Tenochtitlán, and if you ever need to deal with someone using or administrating these services ... you get the picture.)

Officially, both outfits belong to the public sector (i.e., government), funded by tax revenue and under complete governmental control. In practice, they're both run by Aztechnology.

>>>>>(Bulldrek! Frag, you lowlifes just froth over every little chance you can make to put Aztechnology in a bad light, don't you?)<<<<<
—Skald (11:00:35/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Willing to try a little experiment? Call up the Ministry of Health and Welfare voice-mail system: LTG# 0525 (11-5234). When the automated attendant asks for the extension you want, hit *1011 (that's the standard "break" code for the kind of PBX in use at the ministry). You'll get a live operator ... who'll identify himself as "Aztechnology Personnel and Human Resources." Enough evidence for you?)<<<<<
—Jerrilynn (20:32:07/5-10-56)

ENTERTAINMENT

I'm sure I don't need to tell any of you how to find fun in a foreign city, but here's a run-down of what the locals do for excitement.

Trideo

All trideo networks in Aztlan are owned and/or operated by the government or by Aztechnology. No surprise there, *neh?* What this dichotomy really means is that Aztechnology has a strangle hold on the trideo feed of the networks that people actually *watch*. (I mean, who actually watches the [government-operated] Legislature Channel? Not me, bunky.)

Regardless of the well-known truth, the Big A tries to maintain an arm's-length relationship with the trid networks. The most obvious sign of this attempt at distancing is that no part of the entertainment network wears the Aztechnology logo. The owner-of-record for most of the networks is Televisa, an outfit that broadcast television and other electronic entertainment way back in the last century. Televisa was bought out by ORO early in this century, however, and today it's a wholly owned subsidiary of Aztechnology.

Those few networks not "owned" by Televisa position themselves as the "independent" alternative to Televisa. Well, let's just go with your first guess—indeed, the Independents are nothing more than window-dressing. The "Independents" are also owned/controlled by Aztechnology, just through different shell companies and intermediaries.

For the stated reason of preserving its "cultural integrity" (pull the other one), Aztlan slaps mondo restrictions on foreign trid broadcast/narrowcast into the nation. The higher-ups sling a fast line in which they claim to be looking out for the best interests of their country and people by protecting them from the rampant consumerism that has gripped other developed nations and contributed to their economic and spiritual downfall whereas the people of Aztlan have maintained their selfhood in an ever-changing world in which each individual could not possibly make the most informed choice every time and so you see we're from the government and we're here to help (gasp for breath before continuing in the same vein). Anyway, the government's reasoning is extremely suspect, but it has the power to be *very* selective as to what "imports" it lets onto its distribution links, and it exercises that power. As a matter of course, the Aztlaner military (read: Aztechnology) jams direct transmissions from foreign comsats.

>>>>>(Hey, you can't jam direct broadcast.)<<<<<
—VidKid (09:11:15/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Not really. What you can do, though, is mess up the signal enough that the receiver needs mondo sophisticated satdish technology to get a clear feed ... and that kind of technology is illegal for private use in Az.)<<<<<
—FastJack (17:21:37/5-11-56)

On the other hand, Aztlan has no qualms about violating the cultural integrity of other nations by beaming its trid programming to everyone it can reach. Aztlan keeps more than a dozen "deathstars" in geosynch, all beaming down the nation's ... eclectic ... mix of programming and propaganda to every satellite in the world. (Seattlites, you can get a sample of the offered fare on Deathstar-9, transponders 1–3.) If you want to viz blood sports like "Suerte y Muerte" or "Golden Glory," this is the place to find them.

>>>>>(Aztlan has a fair share of pirate stations. Typically, groups who transmit as pirates in Az are shorter lived than their brethren up in the Pacific Northwest ... largely because in Seattle, pirates get a fine or go to jail. In Az, they die horribly in tragic accidents.)<<<<<
—Hume (11:33:36/5-13-56)

Theatre

The *Teatro Figueroa* in the corporate core gives a home to Tenochtitlán's live theatre and opera. The *Cámara* mounts the vast majority of theatrical performances, while *Las Opera de Tenochtitlán* produces operatic entertainment. Hey, no matter how strange life gets, some things never change. Someone's always willing to listen to the fat lady sing—and boy-oh-boy, the augmented concert series can pin you against the wall. While *Las Opera* largely concentrates each season's efforts on works by native composers of this century and last, select operas by Mozart, Bizet, Verdi, and many of the other classic tunesmiths make regular appearances on stage. Both the opera and theatre companies receive direct government funding.

>>>>>(Paid directly by Aztechnology, a circumstance that somehow, um ... narrows the material selected for performance.)<<<<<
—Brunst (14:31:09/5-21-56)

Dance

Tenochtitlán's most famous dance troupe is the Ballet Folklórico, which performs at the New Palace of Performing Arts in the corporate core. This troupe lives up to its name by "dedicating its hearts and souls to keeping alive cultural traditions of

dance and music" that date back to many and various centuries. Sorry for repeating the quote from the PR flacks, but the odd thing is that the publicity seems to be absolutely true—though it's hard to say if their dedication is for good or bad. I can say, however, that the lead dancers only remain in the spotlight for one year; then they apparently sink into obscurity (or perhaps go somewhere less restful) and the first understudy takes their place.

>>>>>(I don't know what NiteSpawn's getting at with the mucho mysterioso hints here, but I've seen the Ballet Folklórico. It may be good at what it does, but what is does is rehash pseudo cultural pablum for the tourists. You want to see real dance, catch the Potro ensemble. Potro's dancers are bioteched to the max (you ain't seen nothing till you've seen an augmented dancer do a jetté), and magic is a regular part of the troupe's spectacular performances. Stone chill.)<<<<<

—Atkins (13:11:39/5-13-56)

Live Music

The National Symphony Orchestra of Aztlan is world famous—so the government PR bumpf claims, and on this score at least it's right. The symphony's official home is the New Palace of Performing Arts, but it also tours a fair bit within the nation and outside as well. One of the most popular concert series the orchestra performs is something that's (rather uncharitably) been dubbed Chipping to the Oldies. The orchestra hires a guest conductor who uses an activesoft to conduct in the precise style of the most gifted, popular, and famous conductors of the past century. Three of the biggest draws are John Arthur Fiedler, Leonard Bernstein, and Sir Georg Solti.

Aztlan also has a pretty banging club scene. No matter what style of music you like to convulse to, you'll find it somewhere in the sprawl.

>>>>>(Maybe I just want to listen to music—you know, appreciate the artistry rather than thrash my limbs around like I've got St. Vitas' Dance while cultivating nearly total hearing loss.)<<<<<

—Lara (09:25:32/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Check out the Tenochtitlán coffeehouse scene, Lara—it's vast compared to Seattle's.

Okay, okay, I know—"coffeehouse" always generates images of oh-so-earnest (and oh-so-lousy) guitar-thwackers playing for free because nobody else would pay 'em a dime to show up. Tenochtitlán's scene knocked that image out of my head right quick. Musicians come to the T-sprawl from all corners of the globe for the opportunity to play for small, appreciative and knowledgeable crowds instead of stadiums full of drunk and disorderly pudknockers. If you know where to look, you can catch some of the best players in the world showing off their licks in the most intimate of settings. (Did I ever tell you about the time I jandered into a coffeehouse that had less than twelve tables and found Sandra Willowfall from Til Es Hault doing an acoustic set on her stick? No? Well, that's a story for another day.))<<<<<

—Rover (23:14:41/5-13-56)

>>>>>(Though I don't personally class it as music, we must note as part of the local scene that Tenochtitlán is still infested by that fourteen-footed pest, the mariachi band. The horror, the horror ...)<<<<<

—DNF (16:14:57/5-15-56)

PROFESSIONAL SPORTS

The Aztlan nation takes only two sports seriously: *ollamaliztli* and *fútbol* (soccer). It's like no other sports exist for the Azzies, or at least pales almost to nothing by comparison. For example, even though Urban Brawl is the number two sport after soccer in the rest of the world, that sport has had very little impact in the happy world of Az. Tenochtitlán doesn't support an Urban Brawl team, though some cities in what used to be Panama and Colombia have the beginnings of a very small league. Similarly, combat biker just hasn't made the cut down in Az. A couple years back, some UCAS promoter set up a series of exhibition matches in Tenochtitlán, Guadalajara, Chihuahua, and Monterrey. Nobody came, Televisa passed on trid coverage, and he lost his fragging jock.

Ollamaliztli

As hurling is to Tir Tairngire, and as the biathlon (that ski-by shooting thing) is to Greater Denmark, *ollamaliztli* is to Aztlan. It's the national game, and the object of an obsession even greater than the Aztlaner love for soccer—which is really saying something.

>>>>>(If you don't sling the lingo, *ollamaliztli* translates roughly as court ball. That's how it's described in the international trid listings, anyway.)<<<<<

—Hume (15:24:57/5-8-56)

It's a frag of an old game, *ollamaliztli*, dating back to ... well, I suppose to the beginning of Aztec history. The trappings have changed—when Moctezuma II watched the game, the playing court didn't have corporate logos and ads blazoned on the walls—but the essence of the game hasn't mutated much.

The game of *ollamaliztli* is played on a long, traditionally stone court (the less significant courts are built of construction composites) called a *tlachtli*. The *tlachtli* is flanked by two high walls. Those spectators lucky enough to get tickets to watch games in-the-meat sit on top of those two walls. One ring extends from the center of each of the two walls, each ring with an internal diameter roughly equal to that of a basketball hoop. The big difference is that these rings are mounted vertically (imagine taking a b-ball hoop and turning it like an old-fashioned key for 90 degrees).

>>>>>(There's a strong ritualistic element to *ollamaliztli*. Courts are often associated with *teocalli*... and the courts connected to the big, mondo important *teocalli* are made out of stone, just like in the way-old days.)<<<<<

—Jervis (00:42:56/5-9-56)

Two teams of three players meet on the court (in the game's modern incarnation, at least). The principle's pretty simple (like with most games, come to think of it): the players have to shoot a rubber ball through the rings to score points ... using only their knees, elbows and hips.

>>>>>(Sounds pretty fragging lame.)<<<<<
—Montkeith (14:21:52/5-6-56)

>>>>>(Guess you've never seen a game, Monty. It's fast and brutal at all skill levels, even the kiddy leagues, but particularly at the pro level. In some ways, *ollamaliztli* is a lot like the sport of hurling. I don't know the exact rules of either game, but to an outsider it looks like it's legal to fragging near geek an opposing player if he's in contact with the ball, was recently in contact with the ball, is about to come into contact with the ball, or is idly considering the possibility of coming into contact with the ball in the indeterminate future. Ergo: lots of broken bones, contusions, lacerations, concussions, and frequent internal injuries. Deaths aren't what you'd label as common, but they do happen.

And before someone asks me: you can find teams at any level open to any combination of gender, metatype, and chrome factor. The only exclusionary event is an annual invitation-only unaugmented human- and male-only mega traditional nationwide tourney that plays as close to the original rules as they've been able to interpret off the ancient documents.)<<<<<
—Legg (19:52:05/5-7-56)

>>>>>(Part of the reason the players suffer so many major injuries is the equipment ... or rather, the lack thereof. Game uniform in the Bigs is a loincloth, leather bands on the wrists and joints. Oh yeah and feathers. (Lower-level players kit themselves out with football-style pads, but it's still an unbelievably brutal game.))<<<<<
—Hume (15:26:15/5-8-56)

I'll leave it to somebody else to explain the rules. All you need to know to keep from sounding like an ignorant furriner is that there're leagues in every part of the nation covering all levels of expertise, from elementary schools right the way up to the pro leagues—the Show, the Bigs, the majors. Most games are trid-cast somewhere in Aztlan, and when long-standing rivals go head to head—this season's grudge match was the Tenochtitlán Jaguars versus the Guadalajara *Acóatl*—the entire fragging economy seems to grind to a halt. Before the game, everyone's betting and arguing who's going to win; during the game the whole nation is glued to the trid set; and *after* the game all the armchair athletes hash out who should have done what to who when.

Aztechnology handles all legal betting on *ollamaliztli* through a special subsidiary. There's a fair whack of *illegal* gambling, too, though the major leagues seem to be pretty clean—especially the invite tourney, which is so closely scrutinized that nobody can get away with *nothing*.

>>>>>(If you really believe that, you're more naive than you seem.)<<<<<
—Harry the Horse (11:35:26/5-14-56)

>>>>>(Hey, I remember reading about this drek in some history book. Do the Azzies still sacrifice the losing team like the Aztecs used to?)<<<<<
—Akula (07:11:08/5-15-56)

>>>>>(The way I heard it, it was the winners who were given the honor of being sacrificed, to rededicate the court to the sun god. But the answer to your question is no, Akula, of course not. Az is fragged up and twisted, but it's not that fragged up and twisted—I expect even the Huey Tlatoani would have a hard sell to convince a nation to willingly give up its greatest sports heroes.)<<<<<

—Socio Pat (15:56:58/5-15-56)

>>>>>(Beg to differ. On three different points.)<<<<<

—LSI (23:12:52/5-15-56)

>>>>>(I think I know where you get that misconception, Akula. There is a simsense game version of *ollamaliztli* that you can play over the Azzie Matrix using 'trodes or (better) via a datajack. Full simsense-immersion VR, either against a computer or against live jacked-in opponents. The sensorium is "traditional"—in other words, you see Moctezuma II in his feathered headdress watching the game—and the losers do lose their heads. Virtually, of course.)<<<<<

—Fraser (09:08:16/5-16-56)

>>>>>(Just go scan the metafile listed as **Shadowbeat** elsewhere on Shadowland. You get the short version of the court ball rules and a great bit of blather on virtual page 62.)<<<<<

—Hume (04:25:56/5-17-56)

Football

What UCASans call soccer, Aztlaners call *fútbol*, and this sport is the second biggest obsession in the nation. Aztlaners are real hardasses when it comes to what the hardest tout as the "purity" of the game, so they don't allow cyber of any kind. As with everything else in Azzie society, metahumans of the right class are welcome in the sport, and play for all regional, state, and national teams.

Aztlan is a major participant in the quadrennial World Cup international soccer competition. (In fact, the 2056 finals are to be held at Aztec Stadium in Tenochtitlán.) National productivity has already begun to drop ever so slightly as fanatics stay up to all hours to watch the qualifying rounds around the globe.

>>>>>(The Aztlaner government put a lot of pressure on the World Cup organizers to make sure that Aztlan and Amazonia wouldn't be in the same qualifying group. Lot of good it'll do. It looks like a shoo-in that the two rivals will be meeting in the second round. I predict major fireworks.)<<<<<

—Royston (23:42:46/5-9-56)

Apart from World Cup games, Aztlaner teams rarely compete outside Aztlan's borders. Each city, state or region has half a dozen teams that play in various domestic leagues, and that's good enough to train new blood for the top echelon of the sport.

ORGANIZED CRIME

Yeah, yeah, like I haven't already heard every joke you slubs just fired off. "There's no organized crime in Aztlan—Aztechnology doesn't like the competition." And the perennial favorite, "Aztechnology's entire global operation qualifies as organized crime," etc. dreketcera. Spare me.

Chip truth? There really isn't that much organized crime activity in Tenochtitlán or in any of the major cities of Aztlan. Lots of freelance stuff, just like you'd expect in any big city, but the major players that keep the UCAS crime scene strapped up so tight just haven't been able to penetrate the Aztlaner market. For example, neither the Seoulpa Rings nor the Triads have managed to maintain even a minor presence in the Aztlaner market. Even though the orgcrime groups come across as minor players in the greater Aztlan/Aztechnology scheme of things, they still rank as major competition in comparison to runners. Don't dismiss 'em—learn, and use that knowledge to your advantage.

Major Players

The yaks have tried to crack the Aztlan market. *Brother*, have they tried. Limited success, all in all. Their infiltration tactics just don't seem to pay the same dividends in Aztlan as they do elsewhere in the world. Not to say the Brothers of the Chrysanthemum have been *totally* shut out, of course—the Yaks handle maybe 50 percent of the prostitution biz in Tenochtitlán.

The Mafia's done a little better—maybe because its European heritage gives it an edge, or maybe I'm just full of drek. The Cosa Nostra treads softly in Tenochtitlán, limiting its operations to smuggling, fencing of stolen goods, and minor gambling—and that's a pretty soft soft-shoe for the Families to dance.

>>>>>(Nobody ever said the Mafs don't learn from their mistakes. Know why they tread softly? Because in 2047 the Mafs started throwing their weight around, and Aztechnology sent them a message.

When the Mafia finished replacing the sudden vacancies in its management ranks, putting out the fires, and washing away the blood, the syndicate came to the conclusion that it could afford to be a little more low-key in its Aztlan operations.)<<<<<

—Monk (09:16:16/5-13-56))

Local Talent

Ah yes, now *this* is interesting. Remember how ORO, now Aztechnology, developed out of the technopirate outfits operating in Mesoamerica and the Caribbean? Not all of those groups got absorbed into ORO when it went legit. Some were ignored ... or, as they claim, declined to go along with ORO's empire-building. Some of those chiplegger and technoflash beetle pirates still do biz in Aztlan (though they usually headquarter somewhere in the Carib League).

These Carib-based pirates have it good *and* have it bad because of their association with the pre-ORO groups. On the good side, they know how to make the biz pay; they learned it from the best. They also know a lot about how Aztechnology polices what it considers *its* business interests (chips and drugs, in this case). When you know how your biggest rival operates, you've got a serious edge.

On the bad side, Aztechnology seems to take inordinate joy in splattering the "local talent" pirates every chance it gets. Bad blood from the past? The suspicion that the Carib pirates' ops are really a personal challenge? I don't know, but that's how it works out.

PLACES OF INTEREST

>>>>>(The following sections are courtesy of another old chummer, Roving I.)<<<<<

—Captain Chaos (14:56:22/5-10-56)

Remember me? Me and my chummers, the Weasel Truth Squad, took time out to do the same scope-job on Tenochtitlán as we did on the Azzie Sector in the FRFZ. Need a place to flop, feed, guzzle, or hang while you're down south? Scan on, MacDuff, and curs'd be he that first says frag this noise, *neh?*

Oh, and a word of warning. We're all accustomed to a little acid rain and clogged air now and again, but in Tenochtitlán those conditions are the norm. Wear an air filter outdoors during the summer, and always at high noon (or even more frequently, if you're feeling cautious—lots of the locals do). Wear a protective poncho if it threatens to rain. If you don't, you're going to be a sick little fragger afterward.

>>>>>(What Flipside alluded to earlier about this air filter/poncho thing—she wasn't kidding. They've become statements of fashion, even of fragging identity. They don't stop with pretty beads and colors, chummers. I've seen lots of air filters and ponchos stylized to look like ceremonial or beast masks or similar regalia. This whole load of drek has become a cultural bragging-rights thing, so even the dirt-poor sport the most amazing nasty weather outfits. Be careful what you say, though; they take it very seriously.)<<<<<

—World Traveler (04:21:17/5-12-56)

HOTELS

A couple of places to flop—for a few of these we even hit the Nice buzzer.

María Isabel-Sheraton Hotel

Luxury Hotel Archetype (20 floors)/Paseo de la Reforma 325 (at Río Tiber)/Consuella Hernandez, Manager/Slight Bias against Orks and Trolls; Extreme Bias against Traditionals/LTG# 1525 (25-3535)/Map Location 1

Plush—that's the word for this place. *Plush* to da max! Everywhere the María Isabel is a combination of cutting-edge tech—nothing really up-your-nose, just *there* whenever you need it—and old-style charm and decor. Dress up and bring a big certstick.

>>>>>(This place is the archetypal meeting ground for the jet-setting glitterati. If that's your meat, enjoy! If not, well, I can think of much better ways to blow 125K pesos per night. (Par-ty! Par-ty!))<<<<<

—Mungo Jerry (07:08:26/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Roving I is right, dress up. If you don't look the part, that "ironclad" reservation you thought you had will coincidentally get mislaid. "So sorry, señor, but what can a poor functionary such as I do?")<<<<<

—Binky (14:56:57/5-14-56)

Camino Real

Luxury Hotel Archetype (14 floors)/Mariano Escobedo 700/Raymond Mallik, Manager/Slight Bias against Orks and Trolls; Extreme Bias against Traditionals/LTG# 1525 (03-2121)/Map Location 2

Speaking on behalf of the entire Weasel Truth Squad, this place receives the coveted "Way Chill" rating. It's old—dates back to the '70s or some damn thing—but you ain't going to find *anything* quite like it anywhere else. The best way to describe the design is "'70s futuristic," right "out-there" ... but in totally the wrong direction, conceptually speaking. Personally, I'm particularly taken with the garish pink entranceway from Mariano Escobedo, and the black-and-gold cape the doorman traditionally wears. Before stopping into the bar called (unimaginatively enough) La Cantina, eyeball the wizzer fountain made out of a single block of volcanic stone.

Be warned: this is a biz hangout for top-drawer corp suits. Lots of Azzies and their hangers-on. Lots of high-level meetings. Lots of megacorp delegations, that kind of drek.

>>>>>("Way Chill," maybe. Also way secure. Chummers, I wouldn't want to try to crack into this place, electronically or in the meat. So it's an ideal spot to hole up if you think somebody else is coming after you. (And if you can afford the tab.))<<<<<

—Largo (13:41:22/5-8-56)

Comfort Inn Aeropuerto

Average Hotel Archetype (4 floors)/Via Tapo (across from the airport)/Kerumi Toshima, Manager/No Racial Bias/LTG# 1525 (62-4088)/Map Location 3

Another serviceable addition to the famous Comfort Inn chain of hostelries, which tells you all you need to know about this place. Next entry.

>>>>>(Comfort Inn's a big chain. Mega-profitable. You'd think, then, they might be able to afford some fragging sound insulation!!!! Aaargh!

Stayed here one night. Just one. Longest night of my life. I'd just faded out when the first suborbital came in over the threshold and the walls began to shake. Thought the rebels were bombing us. Put the pictures back on the walls, got my heart back where it belonged, tried to go to sleep again.

Then the second suborbital of the long, long night made its approach. Mark this place "For Masochists Only.")<<<<<

—Mindy (11:29:23/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Hey Mindy, next time you need help getting to sleep, gimme a call. <wink wink>)<<<<<

—Lance (12:36:11/5-10-56)

>>>>>(What you planning to do, stud? Bore me to sleep with your interminable war stories?)<<<<<
—Mindy (11:02:58/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Ooh. Score. <Racking up one point for Mindy>)<<<<<
—Bung (22:57:50/5-11-56)

Hotel Jena

Cheap Hotel Archetype/Calle Ermita Iztapalapa/"Metl," Proprietor/No Racial Bias/LTG# 1525 (88-5439)/Map Location 4

Pronounce the name "*Heh*-nah" so you don't seem like too much of a dork. Dorks don't have a long projected lifespan at the Hotel Jena. This place is your typical flophouse, complete with hot-and-cold running rats. It's cheap as snot, though, and actually pretty convenient. Right on the main drag of Iztapalapa, it makes for an easy hop to the bus to get anywhere you want to go. (Downside? Buses are loud, and the owner/proprietor of the Jena—a troll who calls himself Metl—apparently has better things to do with his money than install sound insulation.)

>>>>>(This whole area used to be an industrial zone, and it shows. Not one of the high spots of the city, but you want to know something sad? I felt at home.)<<<<<
—Beowulf (09:10:58/5-10-56)

RESTAURANTS AND BARS

A choice of places to nosh or to network—sometimes you can accomplish both at once.

Fouquet's de Paris

Mid-Size Restaurant Archetype/Mariano Escobedo 700 (in the Camino Real Hotel)/Maximillian Shaw, Manager/Slight Bias against Orks and Trolls; Extreme Bias against Traditionals/LTG# 1525 (03-2124)/Map Location 2

Want to drop a bundle on dinner? This is one of the most efficient places to do it. It's a classic hangout for glitterati and glit-wannabes, but on any given day you'll also see a couple of knots of oh-so-serious Aztechnology suits deep in discussion over their white-noise generators.

Food is exquisite, security is admirable. If you can get in here (reservations a must, of course) it's a great place to discuss biz.

>>>>>(I've only been to Fouquet's once, at the invitation of a Johnson. Thank the spirits she was picking up the tab. For two of us, lunch came to 40,000 pesos.)<<<<<
—McIntyre (11:50:26/5-16-56)

Hacienda del Lago

Large Restaurant Archetype/Rep. de Cuba at Argentina/Domingo Chan, Manager/No Racial Bias/LTG# 1525 (21-1153)/Map Location 5

The name means roughly "House of the Lake." No lake and no house within eyeshot, so sorry. This restaurant is on the top floor of one of the many Aztechnology office buildings crowding into downtown. At any given time, about 80 percent of the patrons are Aztechnology suits of one rank or another. Depending on your intentions, that's either way good or way bad. Your call.

>>>>>(Even though the Lago is on top of an Azzie building, you don't have to be an Azzie wageslave to eat here. Shadowrunners take note: the restaurant's security is pretty fragging lax. You can smuggle just about anything in, if you use your skull. Unfortunately, building security more than makes up for this. (Azzie office block, remember?))<<<<<
—Bonzo Dog (10:11:00/5-12-56)

Café de Montevideo

Mid-Sized Restaurant Archetype/Avenida Insurgentes Norte at Montevideo/Jonas Tweed, Manager/No Racial Bias/LTG# 2525 (56-3326)/Map Location 6

Nobody comes here for the food, only for the companionship. If I had to pick one place in Tenochtitlán where the hard-types hang, this place would be it. Chipmeisters deal out of the back. Gunleggers and cyberjacks cut contracts in shadowy booths. And various local gillettes hang at the bar, talking tough and hunting biz.

To get into the other restaurants I've listed, bring a big credstick. To get into the Café de Montevideo—and live to get out again—bring a big 'tude. You start playing dominance games the moment you step in the door. Show fear or even hesitation, and you're ratbait in the back alley.

>>>>>(This is where the "import" runners tend to hang. The local gillettes probably have their own clubhouse, but since I've never been invited I don't know where it is.)<<<<<
—Argent (00:35:11/5-12-56)

Tejas

Bar Archetype/Calz. de las Armas/"Jody," Owner/Extreme Bias against "Suits"/LTG# 2525 (98-3327)/Map Location 7

If you're looking for the typical shadowrunner's bar, the kind of place that runs on testosterone and my-gun's-bigger-than-your-gun machismo, look no further. Tejas is your kind of country.

Interesting locale. It should be choice, overlooking the meandering Rio Hondo. In reality, the Rio Hondo is so full of volatile crap that the windows in Tejas are sealed to prevent somebody from tossing a cigarette butt out and setting fire to the river.

>>>>>(More than that, boyo. If Jody opened the windows, she'd have to issue breathers at the door. Have you smelled the Rio Hondo recently?)<<<<<
—Beowulf (09:12:26/5-10-56)

>>>>>(If you need a contact in the shadows of Tenochtitlán, Jody's your girl. Used to run the shadows under the handle "Laser" until she lost her eyes in a minor mis-cue with a demolition charge. Her cyber-replacements are wizzer, but psychologically she figured she'd lost the edge, and pulled out into the light. (Well, almost.))<<<<<
—Argent (00:36:59/5-12-56)

NIGHTCLUBS

Places to meet and greet, chummers, and a few more things besides.

Cero Cero

Nightclub Archetype/Mariano Escobedo 700 (In the Camino Real Hotel)/Todd O'Grady, Manager/Slight Bias against Orks and Trolls; Extreme Bias against Traditionals/LTG# 1525 (03-2122)/Map Location 2

The Weasel Truth Squad gives Cero Cero three thumbs up. The bright lights of the city come here to see and be seen, to schmooze and dance and nosh and swill. If you can scam your way past the snotty door security, this is one wizzer place to negotiate short-term social contracts (and yes, that means *exactly* what you think it means). Not a good place to meet with fixers or cordite-impregnated gillettes, but one *fine* place to hang if you're trying to infiltrate the upper crust for some felonious reason.

The margaritas are out of this fragging world.

Octli

Nightclub Archetype/Alameda Central (East End)/Marcus Bolton, Manager/No Racial Bias/LTG# 1525 (26-7804)/Map Location 8

Right next to what's left of the Palacio de Bellas Artes (an art museum that should have been condemned decades ago) you'll find Octli, one of the most expensive nightclubs in the city (and that's saying something). The crowd at Octli is ... unusual. Average age and average income are something like 30 and 30,000,000 pesos a year. But those figures tell only part of the story. See, there's two very distinct "populations" at the Octli. There's the rich old farts who are the real clientele—the hair-replacement and keep-looking-young-whatever-it-takes crowd who come to dance and prance and strut and hit on the younger folks. Said folks are actually employees. All young, all beautiful, all highly adaptable and sickeningly limber. The manager, Marcus Bolton, hires his *peces* ("fish") from international modeling catalogues. (Unlike the way this biz runs in other cities, all of the *peces* know what they're getting into when they sign their contracts.)

Essensia

Nightclub Archetype/Avenida Insurgentes Sur/Jon Frommer, Manager/Mild Bias against "Suits"/LTG# 1525 (21-6666)/Map Location 9

Just off-campus from the university, the crowd here is what you'd expect: young and earnest university types, struggling oh so hard to be "alternative" and "cutting-edge." A good place to come if you like this season's hot technoglam hits, pumped out by B-class cover bands at brain-buggering volume. Also a good place to hang if you're into picking up jailbait of either gender. If your tastes are a little more ... *eclectic*, shall we say ... check upstairs.

Upstairs, nicely sound-isolated from the throbbing beat of the club below, is the bar known as Erik's. (Sorry, don't know Erik's ident.) Erik's is the Mecca for Tenochtitlán's bleeding-edge decker community. The hottest technomancers drop in here regularly for a beer and some technical conversation. You need to hire a decker, juice your hardware, bone up on local Matrix etiquette, or just basically get bits and bytes under your fingernails, this is the place to hang.

>>>>>(Yah, maybe Erik's be the happening place. If you can get there. Big if. Bartender and bouncer don't know you? Nobody to vouch for you? Chummer, you sure as frag ain't going upstairs to Erik's.)<<<<<

—Yaz (13:11:05/5-9-56)

>>>>>(Time to work on your social engineering skills. Neh?)<<<<<

—Hauka (12:50.56/5-11-56)

Fábrica

Nightclub Archetype/Viaducto Tlalpan/"Lynx," Manager/No Racial Bias/LTG# 3525 (42-3755)/Map Location 10

Ah, Fábrica. Look for this little gem underneath the Viaducto Tlalpan, right near the aqueduct. It's got no real street address—frag, it's not on a real street—but hack drivers all know it.

The word "Fábrica" means "factory," and the music lives up to its name: heavy retro-industrial, the kind of stuff that sounds like syncopated street repairs with the vocalist being tortured in an echo chamber. (Aural dampers strongly recommended!) The crowd ranges from university types to shadowrunner wannabes to slumming suits to urban predators to real-and-for-true runners. Lynx, the manager/owner, talks like a runner himself, but I don't know anything about his bragsheet.

>>>>>(Lynx is a wannabe puppy. Talks a good game, but he's just mouth.)<<<<<

—Joxtrap (12:13:41/5-10-56)

>>>>>(Man, are you talking about the same Lynx I know ... ?)<<<<<

—Argent (19:56:44/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Don't know why, but the real runners who hang at Fábrica tend to be gillettes. Some nights, the back corners look like a hiring hall for street sammies.)<<<<<

—Peg (00:31:57/5-13-56)

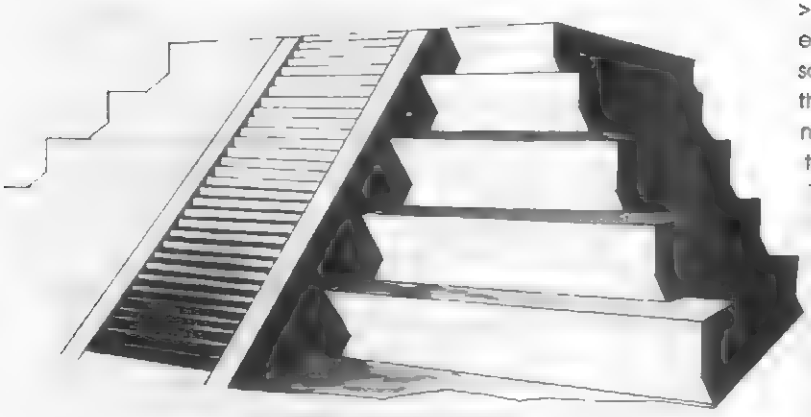
>>>>>(Maybe it's because the street sammies are the ones with the aural dampers.)<<<<<

—Webster (03.11:16/5-13-56)

AZTECHNOLOGY PYRAMID (CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS)

On the Zócalo/Juan Atzcapotzalco, President/CEO of Aztechnology Corporation/No Racial Bias/LTG# 0525 (20-8324)/Map Location 11

Tourist bumpf and government propaganda to the contrary, this place is the heart of Tenochtitlán and Aztlan: the headquarters and central symbol of Aztechnology's power. Predictably, the HQ is laid out like a Mesoamerind stepped pyramid, about 400 meters on a side at the base and just under 700 meters in height.



>>>>>(Hey, that's smaller than the Seattle pyramid ...)<<<<<
—Seven-toed Slim (16:56:17/5-8-56)

>>>>>(True. But in Aztlan, Aztechnology's got office buildings and other facilities scattered all over the fragging city. The HQ building doesn't have to be huge.)<<<<<
—Carstairs (13:30:29/5-9-56)

The pyramid is located on the north side of the Zócalo, the plaza at the center of the city. Up until 2029, the Metropolitan Cathedral stood in this spot. Begun in 1573 and finished around 1667 (I think), the Met was one of the most spectacular Catholic cathedrals anywhere outside Vatican City. Like most of Tenochtitlán, the cathedral was built on soft ground, and the 2029 earthquake wiped it out. Aztechnology acquired the site even though it was deeded in perpetuity to the Catholic Church (long story) and started building the pyramid.

>>>>>(Predictably, Aztlan's Catholics—and there's a lot of them even though they keep a low profile—are still torqued off about this incident.)<<<<<
—Mink (11:51:17/5-8-56)

The pyramid's appearance is striking, combining traditional sandstone with polyglass and copper-finish composites. In the sunlight it looks like a huge gem; at night, brilliant floodlights turn the area bright as noon. The pyramid sports six landing flats, at least two of them LAV-capable.

Security is fragging *intense*. Leopard Guards patrol the place day and night. Missile batteries and laser point-defense installations dot the rooftop. Jaguar Guards are on call, though they don't show themselves unless the drek's really hitting the fan. A mage buddy of mine tells me the astral "airspace" around the pyramid is just churning with spirits and elementals on guard duty.

>>>>>(Despite all the security, in late 2054 a suicide bomber came this close to detonating a car bomb against the base of the building. I guess the Yucatán rebels are really starting to feel their oats.)<<<<<
—Talbot (09:16:59/5-11-56)

>>>>>(I was wondering if anybody'd mention that. Buds, that explosion on the Zócalo wasn't a car bomb. No sir. For some reason, one of those autonomous point-defense missile systems on the pyramid roof hosed off a missile, straight up. What goes up must come down ... so boom, it goes off in the Zócalo, blowing the drek out of a copwagon that happened to be parked there. The car bomb story covered up the fact that the defensive systems had a schizoid episode.)<<<<<
—Melinda (20:18:26/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Do you really believe that?)<<<<<
—Tiny Tim (05:04:18/5-12-56)

TEMPLES

Feel free to stand outside and gawk like a fraggin' tourist, 'cause that's as far as you can go.

Great Temple of Quetzalcóatl

On the Zócalo/Juan Oriz Castenada, High Priest of Quetzalcóatl/No Racial Bias/LTG# 0525 (11-0462)/Map Location 13

The largest and most important *teocalli* in the city, the Great Temple is a standard Mesoamerind stepped pyramid, second in size only to Aztechnology's headquarters. The Great Temple is the central headquarters for the state religion, and security reflects this fact. Like all major *teocalli*, the Great Temple is guarded by Aztechnology security personnel wearing traditional regalia and carrying ceremonial *macauitl* (obsidian-edged swords).

>>>>>(Don't forget what I posted earlier. Those Azzie hardboys guarding the temple don't wear no armor, but you can bet your hoop they've got mondo magical protection of some kind. Also, wizzer as those glass swords of theirs are, they keep serious heaters close to hand.)<<<<<
—Torii (09:57:16/5-13-56)

Temple of Tezcatlipoca

On the Zócalo/Diego Rivera, High Priest of Tezcatlipoca/No Racial Bias/LTG# 0525 (10-4426)/Map Location 14

Located on the southwest corner of the Zócalo, this is the second largest *teocalli* in Tenochtitlán. It's not much smaller than the Grand Temple—15 percent smaller, tops—but just by looking at it you can tell it's the temple of a second-string deity. The architecture isn't as flashy, the banners and flags aren't as bright, the guards aren't as hard-hooped, etcetera.

>>>>>(Okay, it's less honking than the Great Temple. But try looking at it from the astral someday, chummlichen. Second string or not, it still packs some pretty heavy juju.)<<<<<
—Rainer (01:13:27/5-10-56)

>>>>>(For those among us with limited attention spans, or the inability to register and remember names more complex than Pedro or Sam, the temple of Tezcatlipoca is the one where the slag lost his head to a ceremonial sword sometime back.)<<<<<
—Socio Pat (19:05:16/5-10-56)

MISCELLANEOUS LOCATIONS

Other things to see and do.

National Palace

On the Zócalo/Flavia de la Rosa, President/No Racial Bias/LTG# 0525 (11-5255)/Map Location 12

This big ferrocrete edifice is called the "National Palace," but it's nothing like the *old* National Palace that had to be torn down after the 2029 earthquake. *That* building was spectacular—built in the 17th century and expanded over the next 300 years. This one looks like a standard, ugly-as-snot office building.

But I digress. In this stone slab, the prez and her staff do their thing (such as it is) from 08:00 to 14:20 each day. Guards everywhere, as you'd expect.

>>>>>(Lots of guards, true. But overall, security is weaker than in even the most minor Aztechnology facility downtown (let alone the pyramid itself). Kinda tells you where the prez really stands in the grand scheme of things, doesn't it?)<<<<<

—Hauka (12:57:00/5-11-56)

Aeropuerto Benito Juárez

Bulevar Puerto Aereo/George Jerez, Airport Director/No Racial Bias/LTG# 1525 (66-5090)/Map Location 15

Tenochtitlán's main airport, Benito Juarez is classed as national territory under the official jurisdiction of the federal government and the civilian police. Like drek. Just about every uniformed individual there aside from pilots, flight attendants and ticket clerks wears the uniform of the Aztechnology military.

Security here is about as hard-hooped as it gets anywhere (with the possible exception of Vatican City, but don't quote me on that). Maybe it's got something to do with the civil war (or revolution or whatever they're calling it this week), but everybody's paranoid and on-the-bounce about terrorism. Leave a suitcase or briefcase unattended for more than 15 seconds and some Aztechnology johnny will snatch it up and drag it outside for the bomb squad to blow up. Call a greeting to your friend Jack, and you'll probably get shot.

>>>>>(Oh I get it! "Hi, Jack!" Ga-harf ga-harf. (Still, I suppose that the beauty of a pun is in the oy! of the beholder ...))<<<<<

—Bung (09:52:16/5-8-56)

University City

Avenida Insurgentes/Monique Pépin, Chancellor/No Racial Bias/LTG# 5525 (10-2000)/Map Location 16

The National Autonomous University is one of Aztlan's prize boasting points. Say what you like about Aztlan and its people, but there's no arguing that the NAU is pretty fragging flash—not only from an academic point of view, but also from an architectural standpoint. If you've got some time, you owe it to yourself to wander around the huge campus and check it out.

>>>>>(Going tour guide on us, chummer?)<<<<<

—Lucas (16:31:08/5-11-56)

>>>>>(The university's a good place for a neutral meet. Always lots of people around—many of them dressed like shadowrunner wannabes, so you're not going to stick out—and lots of activity. I've done my fair share of biz on the campus. And Roving I is right; there's plenty of architectural eye-candy to keep you occupied while you're waiting for your Johnson to show.)<<<<<

—Argent (16:59:34/5-11-56)

>>>>>(Hey, deckmeisters: check out the NAU CompSci department sometime. Not only is it a good place to learn a few new chops, but if you're slick maybe you can pocket some wizzer hardware.)<<<<<

—D00d (09:00:00/5-13-56)

The Pedegral

Avenida Paseo del Pedegral/Map Location 17

Now *this* place is an interesting little stop on the tour. Just west of the university district, it was once the most exclusive, high-tone residential area in Tenochtitlán. Back when it was a luxury enclave, the minimum lot size by law was 2,000 square meters, and the average house had a value up around the 5 million nuyen mark (in 2020 nuyen).

>>>>>(Ouch!)<<<<<

—The Chromed Accountant (04:37:17/5-8-56)

The wiz thing about the enclave was that all these ever-so-chill houses were built on bluffs and outcroppings of lava rock (*pedegral* means "lava") that had poured out of the nearby Volcan Xitle spirits-know-how-long ago. All the painfully rich figured Xitle was extinct, so they built their houses and pools and tennis courts and whatever right nearby.

Came the earthquake of 2029. As trembiers go, it wasn't that harsh. It brought down the cathedral and wrecked some other century-old places downtown, but modern architecture can stand up to a *lot* bigger hit than that. Unfortunately, Volcan Xitle couldn't. Bubble bubble spurt, and away go all the multi-million-nuyen homes, buried under megatons of new lava. Poetic justice, I say.

In any case, today there ain't much here. Xitle has settled down again, but it's dormant, not extinct. Nobody's risked the money to build new flash homes, so the place got left to the coyotes and cactus and scrub grass and snakes and chimerae and gila demons.

And shadowrunners and bandits. See, there's lots of little caves in and among the bluffs and outcroppings of lava. Nice places to hole up and wait out a heat wave, or to stash things that go boom until you need them. Or whatever.

Alameda Central

Avenida Juárez/Map Location 18

Right in the heart of downtown, this public park used to be the old Aztec market. Now it's a place to stroll by day, a quiet place to sit and eat your lunch amid plants and trees and birds and statuary ... and about fifteen kabillion other like-minded lunch-gobblers. By night it's a great place to get robbed, raped or geeked.

:::::[HECATE] Springtime in Tenochtitlán. You waste our time. We could easily have given this a miss.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You have missed what mattered. You grasped at tangents but you missed the core of the matter.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Then direct our attention. Show us the way to truth, O master. <chuckle>

:::::[UMSONDO] I kept my counsel at the moment of suggested return, wyrm.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I noticed that.

:::::[UMSONDO] It is a question of construct or substance, is it not?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] It is.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] I trust we shall be enlightened regarding this enigmatic exchange. For my part I already see steps must be taken. I have underestimated Aztechnology.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You will note that, from the information here, it does not appear that Lofwyr has made that mistake. I am surprised he has not told you more of his plans.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] He and I don't talk as much as you'd think.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] <chuckle>

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] We will come back to a certain something shortly, but I am still anxious to hear what you plan to do about this.

:::::[HECATE] You mean beyond sending them a polite little warning about being careful about what they call up?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I suspect you are being facetious, but such a warning would be all the more appropriate coming from you.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Hey, now who's being pointed?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] My apologies.

:::::[HECATE] Accepted.

:::::[LADY OF THE COURT] There are others I should tell of this. I'd like to go, if you please.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] If you believe that you have heard all that will be said, then go, and we shall meet again.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] As will we all, and sooner than some of us suspect.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Perhaps. I have instructed my assistant to release the isolation locks. You are free to depart when you choose.

:::::>LADY OF THE COURT HAS LOGGED OFF

:::::[HECATE] This does not frighten me as it does some others. These days are tame compared to the last age.

:::::>HECATE HAS LOGGED OFF

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Bitch. She has no right to be speaking with us.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ah, but the Compact! The Grand Deal! The "If We Don't Stop Yelling At Each Other We'll All Be Dead" Agreement!

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] I never signed it.

:::::[UMSONDO] Nor I.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] No one ever needed you to, Watcher.

:::::[JUNGLE CAT] Thank you, dragon. My eyes did not need opening, but I have seen more today. You will be hearing from me.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Goodbye.

:::::>JUNGLE CAT HAS LOGGED OFF

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Perhaps it is time my best friend and I followed the rest, mine host. <chuckle> But for one thing.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Many have concluded that our little conclave is at an end, painted one.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] But the Watcher remains.

:::::[UMSONDO] I always do. Is that not the way of a Watcher?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I have not forgotten that there was something to return to.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Nor I.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] I can't see the importance of it, however. It is not unusual—ailing men have often been "preserved" one way or another. The Chinese have based their government on that principle. <chuckle>

:::::[UMSONDO] It is a matter of appearance or substance.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] That is not what you first said.

:::::[UMSONDO] I never use words imprecisely.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Is this a matter for a game of words?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Ha! >THE LAUGHING MAN TIPS HIS HAT TO UMSONDO< Magnificent! My friend complains of wordplay!

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Construct or substance. Are you absolutely precise regarding the term "construct"?

:::::[UMSONDO] Did I not say?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Then you imply that something has been created, not preserved, if we deal with construct. This, I suspect, is the illusion. The reality is substance. You do not mean the substance of bodies and blood, do you?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] What?? Impossible! There is no Locus!

:::::[UMSONDO] Did Jungle Cat say so?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] He did not ... It cannot be. It could not sustain ...

:::::[WORDSMYTH] This is the point of the temples and sacrifices, wyrm.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] I am glad that those who remained have the foresight and intelligence to perceive what I had hoped they might.

:::::[WORDSMYTH] Even if your traveling tales were half true, buffoon, they would pale into significance compared to this.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Among us and cocooned with such power? I cannot ... Watcher, Truth or Not?

:::::[UMSONDO] I Watch and do not judge.

:::::>UMSONDO HAS LOGGED OFF

:::::[WORDSMYTH] This changes everything. We must speak to many others.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Brightlight. Brightlight knows, does he not?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] Was there ever anything of substance he did not know if he chose to?

:::::[WORDSMYTH] He will not have dealings outside of his own concerns. I shall deal with those who will. I must go at once. You will need no deceptions or subtle coercions to speak with us again, wyrm.

:::::>WORDSMYTH HAS LOGGED OFF

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Well, I'm impressed. I didn't think I'd ever see that again.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] The tension was almost palpable at times.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] But the conversation light. <chuckle> Did you choose only my friend and I to present the gift of that last revelation?

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] No. As it happened, those too hasty to leave will have to find out from better informed sources.

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Your gift to my friend and I. Sly, sly wyrm. I have to say I am against our telling the mortals too much—and nothing of what you have just let us know. They are far too untrustworthy and likely to misuse what we tell them.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] And your kind has given a better accounting of itself?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Touché. I should go.

:::::[THE BIG 'D'] You have never told our most recent guest about his daughter?

:::::[THE LAUGHING MAN] Nope. Grand, neh? Adios.

:::::>CARRIER LOST: THE LAUGHING MAN

:::::>THE BIG 'D' HAS LOGGED OFF

:::::<Well?>

:::::<Our Channels were beyond the dragon's decker. He never felt or suspected my Presence.>

:::::<What did you learn?>

:::::<Nothing we did not suspect.>

:::::<Was the file capture complete?>

:::::<Yes.>

:::::<Then amend the Shadowland file with their conversation.>

:::::<They will be furious and blame the dragon.>

:::::<Then leave our conversation in, but delete the Names. Let them wonder.>

GAME INFORMATION

The following section contains rules and gamemaster information pertaining to specific subjects discussed earlier in this book. Gamemasters should note that rules for blood magic and conjuring blood spirits apply ONLY to non-player characters. No player character can EVER become a blood mage or conjure blood spirits; only the villains they may face (if they're spectacularly unlucky) can do such things. Gamemasters should be sparing with such villains; users of blood magic are incredibly powerful, and player characters should not have to deal with them often.

AZTLANER MAGIC

Aztlan's indigenous magical tradition is both similar to and significantly different from the traditions familiar to mages and shamans from North America and much of Europe. The familiar distinction between hermetic and shamanic magic still exists to a certain point, though over time more and more elements of both types of magic have apparently begun to overlap. In the Sixth World, only the elite magical practitioners in Aztlan understand just what this means, and they're certainly not telling!

Aztlaner magic recognizes the existence of totems unique to magicians following its traditions. Among the oddities of Aztlaner magic are blood magic, blood spirits, and unique environmental conditions near the temples.

IGUANA

Characteristics: Iguana often seems lethargic, enjoying the warmth of the noonday sun as he basks under the open sky. If necessary, however, he can move with great speed and fight with unsurpassed viciousness. He is one with his environment and never accepts confinement. An Iguana shaman is placid and slow to anger, except when the natural world around him, his own freedom, or that of his comrades is threatened.

Favored Environment: Desert, forest, or mountains.

Advantages: +2 dice for health spells; +2 dice for conjuring desert spirits.

Disadvantages: +2 to all target numbers when in tight quarters. Iguana shamans are often extremely claustrophobic. When imprisoned or trapped in a confined place with no direct view of the sky, an Iguana shaman must make a Willpower Test against a Target Number of 6. If he generates less than 3 successes, he flies into a berserk panic for 3 turns, minus 1 turn for every success achieved.

JAGUAR

Characteristics: Jaguar is a skilled hunter and warrior. She

cares little for subtlety, preferring the most direct route to any goal. A master of many skills, Jaguar never seems at a loss, often to the surprise and dismay of her enemies. Jaguar shamans rarely specialize in a limited package of skills, preferring to acquire a certain level of competence at a wide array of talents.
Favored Environment: Jungle.
Advantages: +2 dice for conjuring jungle spirits.
Disadvantages: –1 die for health spells. Jaguar prides herself on her competence, and feels humiliated when forced to admit she is incapable of a task.

PLUMED SERPENT

Characteristics: Plumed Serpent, also known as Quetzalcóatl, is the archetypal totem of Aztlan, inextricably associated with the nation, its geography and its culture. Plumed Serpent is a warrior who considers his every move before acting. Intimately aware of his nation's history, he always considers how the consequences of his actions will affect his land. A Quetzalcóatl shaman prefers to give his life rather than see his honor or the honor of his nation besmirched.
Favored Environment: Anywhere within Aztlan.
Advantages: +2 dice for any information-gathering spell.
Disadvantages: –2 dice for any magical activity outside the territorial borders of Aztlan.

PUMA

Characteristics: Puma is a stealthy hunter, preferring to move when night can hide her activities. She chooses guile over direct confrontation whenever she can, though she is a lethal fighter when pressed. Puma prefers her own company to that of others, and Puma shamans prefer to be alone (especially when working their magic).
Favored Environment: Any wilderness location except deserts.
Advantages: +2 dice for illusion spells.
Disadvantages: +2 to magical target numbers when in direct sunlight or when in crowds.

BLOOD MAGIC

The so-called Path of the Blood is a unique category of metamagic practiced only within Aztlan by a relatively few high-grade initiates. As with all forms of metamagic (see p. 42, **Grimoire II**), blood magic can be learned and used only by initiates of hermetic or shamanic traditions. Unlike other forms of metamagic such as anchoring, centering, and so on, blood magic is not common knowledge even among initiatory groups. As of 2055, only a handful of Aztlaner initiatory groups—possibly the various orders of "warriors" and certainly a magical group within the priesthood—know, teach, and practice the Path of the Blood. NO PLAYER CHARACTER CAN EVER LEARN HOW TO PRACTICE BLOOD MAGIC. The rules pertaining to it are for NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS ONLY.

The gamemaster needs to take great care in staging the use of blood magic. Practitioners of this art are demonstrating a complete contempt for life and for their victims, and the use of blood magic should be presented in a correspondingly shocking way that carries a great deal of impact. By any reckoning, blood magic is an evil and dangerous practice and should be treated accordingly in any game.

All groups that practice blood magic are under Aztechnology's direct control. Magical groups with knowledge of blood magic typically have the characteristics listed below.

Typical Aztlaner Magical Group

Type: Conspiratorial
Members: Varies
Limitations: Pro-Aztechnology Aztlaners only
Strictures: Exclusive Membership; Exclusive Ritual; Obedience; Secrecy; Limited Membership; Material Link; Oath.
Resources/Dues: High level
Patron: Aztechnology
Customs: All members owe loyalty to Aztechnology first and to Aztlan second. Initiation into the group involves a magical "scan" of the candidate's mind, memories, and aura that makes it impossible for anyone to join such a group under false pretenses.

Using Blood Magic

A caster using blood magic can reduce the Drain of casting spells by drawing from the life force of a willing or unwilling "donor." In essence, the caster drains life force from the donor to contribute power to the spell that the caster would normally draw from the various metaplanes through his or her own body. (Drain is the consequence of inadequately and imperfectly controlling this flow of mana.)

Spells must be specifically learned to be used with this technique, and the action is integrated into the spellcasting. The use of blood magic places many restrictions on the donor (see below), and so casting the spell still only requires a single Complex Action, despite the additional "attack" test the magician makes against the donor.

To use blood magic to resist Drain, the caster must inflict a physical wound on the donor, who must be within arm's reach. For symbolic reasons, the wound must be inflicted with a knife or other edged weapon that relies on the physical strength of the caster. Tradition-minded Aztlaner magicians use an obsidian knife or even a *macauitl* (ceremonial sword). The donor must be motionless, restrained, or otherwise incapable of resistance, giving the magician an Attack Test Target Number of 2. The donor may attempt to reduce this damage by making a normal Damage Resistance Test, using his Body Attribute modified only by dermal armor. The donor cannot use dice from his Combat Pool for this Resistance Test.

The caster can choose to pull his blow, diminishing the amount of damage he inflicts on the donor. The damage rating for the weapon the caster is using is the theoretical maximum damage the weapon can inflict. If he chooses, the caster can reduce the power rating of his attack. For example, a caster with STR 4 normally inflicts 4L damage with a knife. He can choose to inflict only 3L, 2L or 1L of damage on the donor.

The magician casts the spell while simultaneously inflicting the wound. Each Physical Damage box marked off on the donor's Condition Monitor in the action in which the spell is cast counts as 1 success in the Drain Resistance Test the magician must make after casting his spell. If the wound inflicted kills the donor outright with damage beyond the Damage

Overflow (see p. 111, **SRII**), the number of "free" successes in the Drain Resistance Test is increased by one-half (round down) the Essence of the donor as a "bonus" for killing the donor.

The Aztlan shaman Tlamatinime ("Knower-of-Things") wants a pesky group of runners gone, gone, gone. As the runners approach, Tlamatinime draws his knife and reaches for the Aztechnology employee readied for the purpose—handcuffed and bound and unable to resist. As Tlamatinime casts his Force 8 flamethrower spell, he slashes the donor's neck with his knife.

Tlamatinime (Strength 4) rolls his Armed Combat Skill dice, achieving 4 successes. He inflicts 4L damage with his knife against the donor (Body 3). The donor has no dermal armor, so he rolls only 3 dice against a Target Number of 4. Unfortunate soul, he gets no successes at all. That means Tlamatinime inflicts a Serious wound on the donor, marking off 6 boxes on the donor's Physical Condition Monitor. That much damage gives the magician 6 "free" successes when Tlamatinime attempts to resist Drain.

The Drain on this flamethrower spell is [(F2) + 1]S, or 5S. Using the 6 free successes provided by the donor's sacrifice, Tlamatinime can stage the drain down to the point where he takes no damage at all.

In the following Combat Turn, Tlamatinime decides it's time to really get nasty. A few of the runners managed to survive his first attack and Tlamatinime wants this skirmish to end quickly, so he casts a Force 10 Flamethrower spell. He strikes the donor again in the same fashion, this time killing the poor wretch. That eliminates the 4 boxes remaining on the victim's Physical Condition Monitor plus the 3 in his Physical Damage Overflow, giving Tlamatinime 7 free successes plus another 3 bonus successes for killing the donor. With a total of 10 free successes for his Drain Resistance Test, Tlamatinime suffers no drain at all.

Restrictions on Donors: Only self-aware and intelligent creatures can be used as donors. The most common donors are (meta)humans and/or whatever paranormals individual gamemasters consider acceptable. (Sasquatches and dragons almost certainly qualify.) Because the wound must be inflicted physically, NPCs can only use as donors those astral creatures that can manifest physically and that the magician can control.

Self-Inflicted Damage: A magician can use his own blood and life force to power a spell by inflicting a physical wound on himself while casting, just as described above. Some non-player-characters might consider doing this for a couple of reasons. A magician stunned near to unconsciousness may decide to take a Light Physical wound to help reduce the Drain. The magician might also choose to take Physical damage rather than Stun damage because he can magically heal Physical damage.

BLOOD SPIRITS

Blood spirits exist only within Aztlan and can be conjured only within a *teocalli* from the body of a newly sacrificed victim. The size of the blood spirit that can be conjured from a sacrifice depends on the nature of the creature sacrificed (see the Blood Spirit Table). Only Aztlaner shamans can summon blood spirits.

Limitations on Conjuring

Because a blood spirit can only be conjured from the body of a sacrificial victim within a *teocalli*, only the hardest-hooped Aztlaner shamans can whistle up these things. Only initiates of the various Aztechnology-controlled magical groups that teach the dark secrets of blood magic can safely conjure and control a blood spirit. NO PLAYER CHARACTER CAN EVER CONJURE A BLOOD SPIRIT.

BLOOD SPIRIT TABLE

Sacrifice	Maximum Force
Animal[1]	
Small (cat, rat, and so on)	1
Medium (dog, ocelot, and so on)	2
Large (jaguar, and so on)	3
Mundane sentient	Essence
Magically adept sentient	Magic Attribute
Initiate magicians	Magic Attribute[2]
Dragon (or equivalent)	Unknown[2]

[1]For an Awakened animal, increase the maximum force by 1. (For example, a shaman can summon a Force 2 blood spirit from a demon rat, but only a Force 1 spirit from a mundane rat.)

[2]This level of sacrifice allows the shaman to summon the blood spirit in Great form, though he must still undergo an astral quest (as described on p. 64, **Grimoire II**).

Blood Spirit

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R
F + 1	(F + 2) x 3	F – 2	F	F	F	(F)A	F + 1

Powers: Alienation, Attack, Essence Drain (maximum Essence 14), Fear, Guard

Weaknesses: Essence Loss (1 point per day)

Appearance: Varies. Blood spirits often appear as clouds of blood-red mist (actually droplets of blood). Additional reports describe them appearing as hideous humanoids with claws, wings, and hooked beaks.

Commentary: Blood spirits, like vampires, must drain Essence from living victims to maintain their existence. This is true regardless of whether the blood spirit is conjured and performing services for a shaman, bound as an ally, or free. When initially conjured, the spirit "stocks up" on Essence equal to its Force, drawn from the sacrifice victim. Blood spirits are technically classed as Spirits of Man, but have no Domain save that they must always be within their Force x 100 meters of sentient creatures.

Blood Spirit Allies

A shaman who knows the proper technique for conjuring and controlling a blood spirit can try to bind it as an ally. Use the standard ally rules as described on p. 67, **Grimoire II**.

Blood spirits are nasty, bad-tempered and rapacious. This will always show in their physical appearance, and there's nothing a shaman can do to completely hide it. (Even if a blood spirit ally is given the physical form of a fluffy bunny, it'll be a particularly bad-tempered-looking bunny, with the glint of malign intelligence in its eyes, and nasty big teeth.) It's virtually impossible to win a blood spirit's loyalty or friendship, and Aztlaner shamans accept this.

Toxic Blood Spirits

Though blood spirits are pretty fragging nasty to begin with, conjured and controlled blood spirits are not toxic spirits in game terms. Toxic blood spirits are free spirits, properly conjured by the few shamans capable of controlling them but free of that control for some (probably awful) reason. These nasty critters usually track down a toxic shaman and *persuade* him to buy into their agenda, whatever it happens to be (never anything pleasant, that's for sure). Refer to p. 100, **Grimoire II,** for more details on toxic spirits.

TEMPLES AND BACKGROUND COUNT

The area immediately around an "active" *teocalli* has a Background Count of between 3 and 5 (see p. 89, **Grimoire II,** for details about background counts). The Great Temple of Quetzalcóatl and the *teocalli* of Tezcatlipoca in Tenochtitlán have a Background Count of 5. Less important temples have a proportionately lower count ... most of the time. One of the only predictable things about Aztlan is that things are unpredictable, so a tiny village temple to Xochiquetzal (goddess of love and flowers) may well temporarily acquire a Background Count of 5. As a general rule, the background count hinders any shaman or hermetic who is not acquainted with Aztlaner traditions: that is, a shaman who does not follow an Aztlan totem, or a hermetic who is not initiated into the Path of the Blood. The gamemaster determines whether the clergy who work in these *teocalli* benefit from this background count, or whether it has no effect on them. (After all, an Aztlaner blood mage with a cohort of "donors" is quite tough enough without giving him the bonus of a high background count.) For all functions except summoning spirits/elementals the background count is limited to the temple itself (outside as well as inside).

It is particularly difficult to summon spirits and elementals near an active *teocalli*. As a rule of thumb, the background count *always* hinders this kind of summoning. Within the temple and also within 50 meters of it, the background count is at full value. For each additional 50 meters away from the temple, the background count drops by 1. The Great Temple, for example, can hinder a magician attempting a summoning at 200 meters distance.

AZTECHNOLOGY CORPORATE SECURITY PERSONNEL

The following statistics apply to various ACS personnel that player characters may face during runs in Aztlan. The cyberware modifications listed represent the equipment carried by the standard personnel of that type. The gamemaster should alter those modifications as needed to suit his adventure or campaign.

BORDER AGENT

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
5	6	5	3	4	4	3.5*	5 (7)	5/3

Initiative: 7 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Car 2, Etiquette (Corporate) 4, Etiquette (Street) 3, Firearms 5, Stealth 4, Unarmed Combat 3
Cyberware*: Smartlink, Wired Reflexes (1)
Gear: Armor Jacket (5/3 + Helmet), Commlink, Colt Cobra [SMG, 32 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 6M, w/1 extra clip, Recoil Reduction 1, Integral Smartlink]
*Cybermods may vary; adjust Essence to reflect optional equipment.

BORDER AGENT COMBAT SHAMAN

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
3	4	2	1	5	5	6	4	5/3

Initiative: 4 + 1D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Car 2, Conjuring 3, Etiquette (Corporate) 4, Etiquette (Street) 3, Firearms 2, Sorcery 6, Stealth 1, Unarmed Combat 2
Cyberware: None
Gear: Armor Jacket (5/3), Commlink, Colt Cobra [SMG, 32 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 6M, w/1 extra clip, Recoil Reduction 1, Laser Sight], Spell Lock (Armor/4 successes), Spell Lock (Personal Combat Sense/2 successes)
Spells: Armor 3, Mana Bolt 4, Manaball 4, Personal Combat Sense 3, Power Bolt 3

STANDARD SECURITY GUARD

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
5	4	4	2	4	3	2.5*	4	8/6

Initiative: 4 + 3D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Etiquette (Corporate) 4, Etiquette (Street) 2, Firearms 6, Stealth 3, Unarmed Combat 3
Cyberware*: Smartlink II, Synaptic Accelerator (2) (p. 28, **Shadowtech**), Trauma Damper (p. 29, **Shadowtech**).
Gear: Heavy Armor (8/6 + Helmet), Commlink, Ares Alpha Combat Gun [Assault Rifle, 42 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 8M, w/1 extra clip, Recoil Reduction 2, Integral Smartlink II, underbarrel grenade launcher]
*Cybermods may vary; adjust Essence to reflect optional equipment.

LEOPARD GUARD

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
5	6	6	2	4	5	3.5*	5 (7)	12/8

Initiative: 7 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Armed Combat 4, Demolitions 3, Etiquette (Corporate) 3, Firearms 4 (Assault Rifles 6, Ares Alpha Combat Gun 8), Gunnery 4, Leadership 3, Military Theory 3, Stealth 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Cyberware*: Smartlink II, Wired Reflexes (1)
Gear: Ares Alpha Combat Gun [Assault Rifle, 42 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 8M, w/1 extra clip, Recoil Reduction 2, Integral Smartlink II, underbarrel grenade launcher], Commlink Cougar Fineblade Knife (long blade, [(STR + 1)M]), Medium Military Armor (12/8 + Helmet)
*Cybermods may vary; adjust Essence to reflect optional equipment.

JAGUAR GUARD

B	Q	S	C	I	W	E	R	Armor
5	6	6	3	5	6	0.5*	5 (7)	12/8

Initiative: 7 + 2D6
Threat/Professional Rating: 4/4
Skills: Armed Combat 4, Demolitions 3, Etiquette (Corporate) 3, Firearms 5 (Assault Rifles 7, Ares Alpha Combat Gun 9), Gunnery 4, Leadership 5, Military Theory 4, Stealth 4, Unarmed Combat 4
Cyberware*: Smartlink II, Wired Reflexes (1), Vehicle Control Rig (2)
Gear: Ares Alpha Combat Gun [Assault Rifle, 42 (clip), SA/BF/FA, 8M, w/1 extra clip, Recoil Reduction 2, Integral Smartlink II, underbarrel grenade launcher], Commlink, Cougar Fineblade Knife (long blade, [(STR + 1)M]), Medium Military Armor (12/8 + Helmet)
*Cybermods may vary; adjust Essence to reflect optional equipment.

MEDÍCARRO

MediCarro, Aztlan's equivalent of DocWagon™, uses the same rules as those written for DocWagon in **The Neo-Anarchists' Guide to Real Life**, with the changes described below.

RESPONSE TIME

The physical location and Enforcement Rating of the area from which the call is placed, as well as the availability of ground or air units, all affect response time. When MediCarro receives a call, the gamemaster must first determine the type of unit available to respond by rolling 1D6 and consulting the Response Vehicle Table. To determine the vehicle's response time, the gamemaster rolls 3D6 and modifies the result using the MediCarro Response Time Table. These modifiers are cumulative. Note that MediCarro has a minimum response time of 4 minutes.

RESPONSE VEHICLE TABLE

Die Roll Result	Vehicle Type
Standard Call	
1–4	Ground
4–6	Air
High Threat Response Call	
1–3	Ground
4–5	Stallion
6	Osprey II

MEDÍCARRO RESPONSE TIME TABLE

Situation	Modifier
Area of Call	
Tenochtitlán, corporate area	–2
Tenochtitlán, core	–1
Tenochtitlán, outskirts	+1
Other major city, core	—
Other major city, outskirts	+2
Minor city, core	+1
Minor city, outskirts	+3
Small town/village	+10
Up to 10 km beyond city/town limits	+10
More than 10 km beyond city limits	NA
Aztechnology-owned territory	–3
Enforcement Rating	
AAA–AA	–2
A–B	–1
C	—
D	+2
E	+4
Z	+8
Type of Response	
Standard Response Team	—
Critical Response Team	+1
High Threat Response	See Note
Ground Vehicle responding	—
Air Vehicle responding	–2

Note: If dispatched immediately upon receiving a call, the response time for a High Threat Response team is modified by –1. If a Standard Response Team responds to a call and then calls for HTR backup, the response time is calculated normally.

NEW EQUIPMENT

Player characters may need to defend against or may acquire the following weapons and vehicles in Aztlan.

MACAUITL (CEREMONIAL SWORD)

This largely ceremonial melee weapon is about 10 centimeters wide and a meter long, with a rounded end. The blade and the pommel are made of densiplast (or, for symbolically important weapons such as the one sometimes carried by

the president at ceremonial occasions, oak). Embedded along each edge of the weapon are sharp slivers of obsidian (sometimes flint). Though the sword looks jury-rigged and ineffective, it is sharp enough to decapitate a horse with a single stroke (as the Conquistadors discovered to their detriment). The obsidian slivers are fragile, however. If the sword strikes anything hard, such as hardened armor, the chips on the striking edge will shatter, though the sword delivers damage from that blow. Once both sides of a *macauitl* have been shattered, it becomes nothing more than a club.

Macauitl are often enchanted, meaning that they can act as foci or have spells anchored to them.

Concealability	Reach	Damage	Weight
3	1	(STR + 2)M	1
Availability	**Cost**	**Street Index**	
18/7 days	3,000¥	2	

RELÁMPAGO 120MM RAILGUN

A brutally powerful vehicle weapon manufactured and used by Aztechnology, the Relámpago ("Lightning") uses high-capacity capacitors and multiple electromagnets to accelerate a ferrous slug to extreme velocities. The slug does terrific damage through sheer kinetic energy. Capacitor recharge takes 1 Combat Round, so this heavy weapon can only fire in every second round. This behemoth takes up 2 CF for the gun itself, another 2 CF for the capacitors, and yet another 1 CF for ammunition, and so it can only be mounted in relatively large vehicles such as LAVs.

A Relámpago can always be identified by the distinctive, deafening whip-crack caused by the hypervelocity round exiting the barrel.

Type	Ammo	Damage	Cost
Railgun	Single rounds	20D	400,000¥
	Range (in meters/kilometers)		
Short	**Med.**	**Long**	**Extreme**
5–500	501–1,200	1,201–5km	5–12km

HALCÓN GROUND-ATTACK AIRCRAFT

Aztechnology's primary ground-attack fixed-wing aircraft, the Halcón is designed as a tank killer. Its standard weapons array includes two Vigilant autocannons, eight AGMs (roughly comparable to Mitsubishi-GM Bandits), four pods of 10 unguided 12.7cm rockets, and various semi-autonomous or autonomous (fire-and-forget) guided munitions. The autopilot and ground-following radar allow nape-of-earth approaches at full speed, at an altitude of less than 10 meters AGL. The Halcón is nimble enough to act in an air combat maneuvering role, for which suitable loadouts are available.

Handling	Speed	B/A	Sig	APilot	Cost
Halcón3	900/1800*	5/4	6	4	20M¥

Seating: 1 bucket seat **Access:** 1 canopy
Economy: .5km per liter **Fuel:** 2,500 liters
Cargo: 3 CF storage
Sensors: Military II (7)
ECM/ECCM: Military II (5)/Military II (5)
Additional Features: Armament varies, but standard models have two hardpoints in the nose that mount two Vigilant rotary autocannons with 250 rounds each. Also available are two centerline, under-fuselage hardpoints with 15 CF each, two inner-wing hardpoints with 8 CF each, and two outer-wing hardpoints with 5 CF each that mount a variety of ordnance and/or weapons pods.
*Speed increases to 2,700 kph on afterburner, but Economy also drops to 8 liters per km.

LUFTSCHIFFBAU ZEPPELIN LZ-2051-C

The standard workhorse of the world's air cargo fleets, the LZ-2051-C is a familiar sight in the skies over virtually every country on the globe. SHAPELY (SHaped Airfoil Positive Enhanced Lift) technology, perfected on the LZ-2049, gives the much larger LZ-2051-C optimum fuel economy, which more than makes up for the craft's slow speed.

Handling	Speed	B/A	Sig	APilot	Cost
LZ-2051-C					
3	80/170	14/1	10	3	1.2M¥

Seating: 2 + 2 bench **Access:** 1 standard + 1 extended cargo
Economy: 10 km per liter **Fuel:** IC/4,000 liters
Cargo: 8,000 CF*
Options: Unlike the smaller LZ-2049, no provisions are made for passenger or troop-carrier modules; the cargo bay is not pressurized and no power couplings exist to drive local systems. A LZ-2051-C can be custom-modified, but only on a private basis.

*The cargo bay has 8,000 CF capacity, enough to hold eight seven-meter standard containers (1,000 CF internal space each). There is no option for an external slung load.

LOBO MEDIUM SCOUT LAV

Aztechnology's Lobo ("Wolf") is similar in design to the familiar Banshee, but slightly longer and almost 10 percent broader than its smaller cousin. Though classed as a scout vehicle, it packs enough firepower to rival some light battle tanks.

Handling	Speed	B/A	Sig	APilot	Cost
Lobo LAV					
3	400/850	7/7	4	3	12M¥+

Seating: Single bucket seat + twin bucket seats
Access: 3 cupola hatch + 1 rear hatch
Economy: 0.4 km per liter
Fuel: IC/3,000 liters
Cargo: 25 CF cargo
Sensors: Military II (7)
ECM/ECCM: Military III (6)/Military II (5)
Landing/Takeoff Profile: Effective VSTOL (vector thrust)
Options: Standard Aztlaner military configuration places a Relámpago 120mm railgun in the turret along with a 2,500 round, coaxial Victory rotary assault cannon, both with antiaircraft capability. The commander's cupola in the turret center is a microturret mounted with a single 750-round HMG. Side-mounted, independently targetable small turrets each contain a four-slot, armor-protected missile launcher. Depending on tactical requirements, two three-slot external missile racks can be mount-

ed on the forward and rear decks. (These deck-mounts have limited arcs of fire.) One or both of these external racks can be replaced with a two-slot drone rack, typically equipped with Liebre RPVs (either standard or Forward Observer configuration).

TIBURÓN PATROL BOAT

This 15-meter boat uses nonmetallic composite technology similar to that of the famed Nightrunner. The Tiburón is the closest thing Aztechnology has to a true "stealth" boat.

Handling	Speed	B/A	Sig	APilot	Cost
Tiburón					
3	30/90	6/4	5	3	400,000¥*

Seating: Twin bucket seats + rear bench
Economy: 12 km per liter
Fuel: IC/1,000 liters
Cargo: 20 CF cargo
Sensors: Military II (7)
ECM/ECCM: Military II (5)/Military I (4)
Options: The standard configuration is an intelligence-gathering platform with limited armament. One microturret is mounted in the stern, another in the bow. These are typically equipped with a 500-round HMG with antiaircraft capability.

Interdiction variant: This more heavily armed version sports a medium turret in the bow and a small turret in the stern, each with a 315-degree arc of fire. Two microturrets are mounted at midship, port and starboard. Typical weapon configuration includes a Victory rotary assault cannon (500 rounds) with a co-axial HMG (1,000 rounds) in the bow turret; two coaxial Vanquisher miniguns (500 rounds each) in the stern turret; and a Vengeance minigun (500 rounds) in each of the midship microturrets. Other configurations, including a task-specific "missile platform," have also been reported.

*This figure does not include sensors or weapons.

LIEBRE SURVEILLANCE/PURSUIT RPV

Aztechnology's Liebre ("Hare") drone is an obvious knock-off of the hugely successful CAS Wandjina RPV. The Aztechnology model is considerably slower, more fragile, and less well-armed than the CAS drone, but it makes up for these weaknesses with upgraded sensors and a lower price tag. Aztechnology doctrine reserves the Liebre for surveillance and pursuit, particularly at border-crossing posts, rather than using it as an assault RPV. Note that the Liebre does not have a "stealth" mode. A much costlier version than the standard (1.1 million nuyen) is configured to act as a Forward Observer (FO) and missile-target designator.

Handling	Speed	B/A	Sig	APilot	Cost
Tiburón					
3	900/1800*	5/4	6	4	45 CF 20M¥

Economy: 4 km per liter
Fuel: MultiF/400 liters
Cargo: N/A
Operational Duration: Fuel-limited
Setup/Breakdown Time: 10 minutes
Sensor Package: Security I (4)
Landing/Takeoff Profile: STOL
Additional Features: Standard armament is a single Vanquisher minigun and 1 CF of dedicated ammo storage in the nose. For the FO variant, sensors are upgraded to Military I (6) and ECM/ECCM rating Security III (3) replaces the minigun. The FO drone can obtain a lock-on and guide missiles fired by friendly units that do not have a lock on the target, but do have a direct line of sight to the drone.

EFFECTS OF LIFE IN TENOCHTITLÁN

Because of the overcrowding, pollution, high altitude, and prevalence of germs to which outsiders are unaccustomed, visitors to Tenochtitlán temporarily suffer the following effects.

DECREASED TOLERANCE

Newcomers to Tenochtitlán resist diseases and toxins with slightly less than their actual Body Attribute. The value of the Attribute is reduced by –1 for all appropriate Resistance Tests. This increased susceptibility lasts for 10 + D6 days (the Rule of Six applies to this roll). Characters equipped with the extended-volume bioware modification (p. 31, **Shadowtech**) do not suffer decreased tolerance.

INCREASED DRAIN

Magicians unaccustomed to the altitude of Tenochtitlán resist drain from spellcasting with less than their actual Willpower Attribute. The magician's Willpower is reduced by –2 for all Drain Resistance Tests. This increased susceptibility to drain lasts for 12 + D6 days (the Rule of Six applies to this roll). Characters equipped with the extended-volume bioware modification (p. 31, **Shadowtech**) do not suffer increased drain.

AIR POLLUTION

The intensity of the air pollution in Tenochtitlán varies from day to day. To determine the "pollution index" for the day, the gamemaster rolls 1D6 and halves the result, rounding up. Players can offset the effects of pollution by having their characters wear an air filter of a Rating equal to or better than the pollution index. Cyber-implants can also offset the effects of air pollution. Characters without adequate protection risk becoming ill.

A poorly protected or unprotected character must make a Body Resistance Test against a target number equal to the pollution index, minus the rating of any less-than-adequate protective measures, times two. For example, a character with a Rating 1 air filter encountering a pollution index of 3 must make his or her Body Resistance Test against a Target Number of 4 (3 – 1 = 2, 2 x 2 = 4). Dermal armor or similar cyber/bioware does not apply to this test. Though the damage is equivalent to Moderate Stun damage, it heals as if it were Physical damage. Base exposure time is half an hour, so reduce the target number by 1 for every ten minutes less than that during which the character is actually exposed (this includes any time spent outside of a climate-controlled and filtered environment.)

ACID RAIN

Everyone is assumed to have at least a Mild allergy to acid rain. See p. 220, **SRII**, for more information.

A
Acapulco de Juárez harbor, 115, 131
Acid rain, 180
Acquisition specialist, 62
Adaptive ice, 74
Aeropuerto
  Benito Juárez, 171
  Montezuma, 123
Aero Tierra, 123
Air force, 78
Air insertion, of assets, 126–28
Air Montezuma, 123, 157
Air pollution, 180
Airports, 121, 171
  scheduled flights, 122–23
  security, 123–24
  unscheduled flights, 124–25
Alameda, 45
Alameda Central, 171
Alamo, Battle of the, 35, 39
Alcázars, 136
Alcohol, 145
Amazonia
  blood magic and, 114
  border with, 106, 130
  Colombia annexation, 41
  rain forests of, 114
  spirits of, 64
  support of rebels, 22–23
  Venezuela annexation, 41
Annexation
  of San Diego, 40
  of Venezuela, 41
Architecture, 161–62
Ares Macrotechnology, 161
  operational profile, 73
  Operation Big Gun, 47
  Operation RECIPROCITY and, 45
  nuclear capability of, 110
  personnel sieve, 72
  satellite-to-ground delivery systems 110
Army, 77
Artificial intelligence (AI), 64–67
Assassinations, 16–18, 79
Assets
  guarding of, 75
  hardening of, 43
  insertion of, 118
    conventional channels, 119–26
    extraordinary channels, 126–32
  nationalizing, 43
  pan-corporate direct action against, 43–46
Astral security, 74, 123–24
Atzcapotzalco, Juan, 57, 60–62
  offering to, 93–94
  rumors of, 64
Austin, 40
Autobús, 157
Autoroute, 16, 156, 261
Autosacrifice, 90
Avenue of the Dead, 33
Ávila, Miguel, 17, 36
Awakened creatures, 103, 130
Awakening, 52, 113
Azatlán Party, 38, 148
Aztec civilization, 33–34
  deities of, 84
  emperor, 86
  language, 150–51
  religion, 86–94
Aztec-Nahua, 150–51
Aztechnology Corporate Security (ACS), 73
  border-crossing points and, 125–26
  Jaguar Guards, 75
  Leopard Guards, 75
  magical security, 73–74
  matrix security, 74
  personnel, 177–78
  physical security, 75
  uniform of, 16, 75
Aztechnology Corporation. *See also* ORO Corporation
  acquisitions, 70–71
  behavior-modification, 57
  business practices, 69–72
  competitive practices, 70–71
  Corporate Court and, 43–47, 54–55
  corporate structure of, 58–68
  decision-making at, 67
  divisions of, 58
  drug cartels and, 51–52, 141
  economic control, 56–57
  electoral system and, 56, 149
  expansion practices, 70–71
  headquarters, 58
  history of, 51–57
  intelligence-gathering, 78–79
  intercorporate relationships, 71–72
  key industry of, 69
  magic and, 57
  Management Information System, 61
  management structure, 60
    board of directors, 62–68
    corporate politics and, 62
    senior management team, 60–62
  military, 76
    air forces, 78
    bases, 76
    equipment, 76
    ground forces, 77
    naval forces, 77
    organization of, 76–78
    space forces, 78
  name change, 54
  Operation RECIPROCITY and, 43–47, 54
  ownership of, 59–60
  personal control, 57
  pyramid, 169–70
  recruitment by, 72
  religion and, 88
  security, 54, 73–75
  subsidiaries of, 58–59
  and stock market, 141
  technical control, 56
  trideo networks and, 163
  Veracruz Settlement and, 41, 47, 54
  war with Komatsu Corporation, 70–71
Aztec Stadium, 166
Aztlan
  culture, 32–34
  foreign-owned businesses in, 41
  history of, 34–40
  name, 38
Aztlan Armed Forces (AAF), 16, 76–77
  air units, 78
  ground units, 77
  naval units, 77
  space units, 78
  weapons, 16
Aztlan Freedom League (AFL), 28
Aztlan Immigration Services
  resident alien status, 120
  travel visas, 119
Aztlan republic, 40
  member states, 41

B
Background checks, 119
Background count, rules, 177
Bahía de Espíritu Sancto, 28
Baisetsu, Toko, 109
Balboa, 107, 115
Ballet Folklórico, 163–64
BANCOMEXT, 58
Bars, 168
Batiste, General Paolo, 78–79
Bay of the Holy Spirit, 28
Belize, 106
  Mayan civilization and, 32
  language of, 151
  membership in Aztlan republic, 41
Big Pyramid, 22
Black Daggers, 75
Blind spots, 103
Blood magic, 26–27, 98–102
  Amazonians and, 114
  rules, 175–76
Blood offering, 93–94
Blood rites, 85
Blood sacrifices, 64
Blood spirits, 57, 64–65, 100–2
  allies, 177
  conjuring limitations, 176
  rules, 176
  toxic, 177
Board of directors, Aztechnology Corporation, 62–68
Border, 106
  agent, 177
  buffer zone, 128
  crossing points, 125–26
  demilitarized zone, 128
  northern, 128–30
  security, 128–29, 130, 144
  southern, 130
Breathers, 158, 161
Brothers of the Chrysanthemum, 166
Buffer zone, 128
Burakumin, 137
Business Relations Board, 36

C
Cali
  cartel, 51
  military base at, 76
California campaign, 40
California Free State, 106, 128–30
Camp
  Entrañas, 28
  Naranja, 28
  Templo, 28
Campeche
  assault on, 19
  governor, assassination of, 16
  Mayan civilization and, 32
  military base at, 76
  uprising, 17
Canal de Panamá, 107
Cancún, 16, 17
Caracas, 41
Car bomb, 17, 18
Cargo routes, 126–27, 131
Cartagena
  harbor, 115, 131
  military base at, 76
Cartel managers, 51. *See also* Drug cartels
Castes, 112
Castillos, 136
Catholic Action Front, 28
Catholic Church
  empire of, 34–35
  metahumanity position of, 36
  missionaries, 34
  restrictions on, 94
  size of, 95
  state church of Mexico, 35
  support of PAN, 36, 94
  suppression of, 84, 94
  underground organization, 94
Chalco Computer Systems, 47
Chamber of Deputies, 147, 148
Chemical industry, 69, 70
Chiapas
  governor, assassination of, 16
  Mayan civilization and, 32
  uprising, 16–17
Chips, 144–45
Citizens' action committees, 18–19
Citizenship, 120–21
Ciudad seaport, 131
Civilian militia, 24
  Especial unit, 17
  role in uprisings, 17
  weapons of, 17
Civil war
  Amazonian support of, 22–23
  assassinations, 16–18
  Campeche uprising, 17
  Chiapas uprising, 16–17
  civilian militia, 17
  ferry incident, 25
  guerrilla tactics and, 24, 25
  magic use in, 26–27
  mercenaries and, 24–25
  objectives of, 22, 25
  Operation Libertad, 28–29
  psychological warfare and, 25–26
  wall of skulls, 25–26
  Yucatán uprising, 16–17
Climate, 113
Coatzacoalcos harbor, 115
Collateral damage, 143
Colombia, 106
  annexation of, 41
  drug cartels of, 51–53
    bribes and, 36
    role in civil war, 17
  membership in Aztlan republic, 41
  technopiracy in, 52
Colonial invasion, 34–35
Colonialism, cycle of, 22
Communal farms, 140
Communications, 162
Competition, dealing with, 70
Confederated American States (CAS), 23, 39
  access restrictions, 122
  border with, 106, 128–30

Texas' secession from, 40
ConsOps (Consular Operations)
asset insertion channels, 118
conventional, 119–26
extraordinary, 126–32
Corporate boycotts, 36
Corporate Court
Letters of Incorporation, 43
Operation RECIPROCITY, 43–47, 54
Pan-Corporate Security Committee, 44–47
Pan-Corporate Zone and, 109–10
Corporate sector, 159–60
Corporate security, 73–75
Corporators, 136
Corruption, 68, 85
Cortés, Hernán (Great Killer), 34
Cosa Nostra, 166
Cost of living, 142
Counterespionage, 79
Covert asset insertion, 126–32, 132
Criminal offenses, 143–46
Cross-country insertion, of assets, 128–30
Cults, 93–94
Cultural groups, 111–12
Culture, 32–34
Currency, 139–40
Cyberdecks, 145
Cybernetics, 69
Cyberware, 145

D
Dance, 163–64
David cartel, 51, 52
Deities, 84–85
petitioning, 88–90
Demilitarized zone, 128
Demographics, 111–13
Demons of twilight, 92
Demon worship, 92–94
Denver Data Haven, 37, 66
Desert Range Proving Grounds, 45
Direct insertion, of assets, 127–28, 131
Dirigibles, 107
Distrito Federal, 16–17, 148
Dracoforms, 112
Dragon
Occidental, 112
Oriental, 112
rumor, 59–60, 62, 67–68
Drain, increased, 180
Drug cartels, 141
Aztechnology Corporation and, 51–52
bribes, 36
influence of, 52
legitimate business of, 52
role in civil war, 17
technopiracy and, 52–53
Drug lords, 51
Drugs, 17

E
Eagle order, of warrior, 80, 81
Earthquakes, 162, 171
Eastern Caribbean Air, 123
Economy, 139
currency, 139–40
exports, 140–41
imports, 140–41
stock market and, 141–42
Ecuador, drug cartels, 17
Ejidos, 140
Elections, 148–49
Electoral system, 37, 56, 149
Electronic intelligence (ELINT), 79
Electronic listening posts, 79
El Salvador, 106
drug cartels in, 52
membership in Aztlan republic, 41
Emergency services, 162
Emperor, 86
Ensenada
incident, 44–46, 54
military base at, 76
Entertainment, 163–64
Equipment
military, 76
rules, 178–80
Especial units, 17
Executive action team, 79
Exports, 140–41
Extraction, 61, 72

F
Farmers, 138
Fashion, 160–61
Federal District. *See* Distrito Federal
Fellini-Med, 161
Fente Democrático Nacional (FDN), 18, 36, 148
Ferry incident, 25
First Nations, 22
Flame of Freedom, 28
Football, 166
Forberger, Nicola
journey of, 15–20
serpent interview, 21–27
Foveae, 103
Fractional-Orbit Bombardment Systems (FOBS), 110
Freedom fighters, 22. *See also* Civil war; Rebels; Uprisings
Free spirits, 112, 113
Front Range Free Zone (FRFZ), 122–23
Fuchi Industrial Electronics
Asia division, 61
artificial intelligence and, 66
Operation RECIPROCITY and, 45
Fútbol, 166

G
Gaillard Cut, 107, 109
Gatun Lake, 107
Global Airways, 122
Golfo de los Mosquitos, 52
Government
Azatlán Party, 30
caretaker, 37
coalition, 36
control over
economic, 56–57
personal leverage and, 57
technical, 56
direct democracy model, 37
elections, 148–49
electoral system, 56
local, 147–48
Mexican
collapse of, 19
governing coalition, 18
opposition parties, 148
structure, 146–48
Tenochtitlán, 154, 156
Great Ghost Dance, 26–27, 85
Great Temple, 87
of Quetzalcoatl, 170
GridGuide hardware, 156, 157
Guatemala, 106
language of, 151
Mayan civilization and, 32
membership in Aztlan republic, 41
Guerreros, 79–81
Guerrilla wars, 24, 25

H
Hada, 113
Harbors, 115
Henequen (serpent), 32
Hermetics, within clergy, 87
High Priests, 87, 88
Honduras, 106
drug cartels in, 52
membership in Aztlan republic, 41
technopiracy in, 52
Hostile takeovers, 70
Hotels, 167–68
Houses of Darts, 86
Houston, Sam, 35
Houston Medical Center, 63
Huey Tlatoani, 86
Huitzilopochtli, 85
High Priest of, 87, 88
Human sacrifice, 91

I
Iguana
rules, 174
totem, 97
Immigration datawork, 119–21
Imperial Marines, 45
Import community, 138
Imports, 140–41
Income, 111
Indian Wars, 22
Industrial espionage, 79
Industry, 69
Institutional Revolutionary Party. *See* Partido Revolucionario Institucional
Intelligence operatives, 79
Intelligence gathering, 78–79
Inter-Corporate Council, 53. *See also* Corporate Court
Intercorporate relationships, 71–72
IWIA (Independent West Indies Air), 123, 124

J–K
Jaguar
Awakened, 130
Guards, 75, 170, 178
order, of warrior, 80, 81
rules, 174–75
Sun of the, 92
totem, 97
Jesuits, 34–35, 36, 89, 96
Joint ventures, 54
Knight, Damien, 64
Komatsu Corporation, 70–71

L
Lakes, 115
Land reclamation, 39–40
Language, 149–51
Las Opera de Tenochtitlán, 163
La Venta, 32
Laws, 143
on chips, 144–45
on cyberdecks, 145
on cyberware, 145
on mindbenders, 144–45
on weapons, 143–44, 145
Leopard Guards, 75, 170, 178
Listening posts, 129
Locks, 107–8
Locus point, 114
Lodge meetings, 80
Lone Star, 56
GridSec division, 74
Militia, 40
weapons, 143
Los Humo Grande, 158

M
Macauitl, 170, 175, 178
Madden Dam, 108
Mafia, 166
Mages, 73
combat, 81
foveae and, 103
Magic, 97
blind spots, 103
blood, 26–27, 98–102
Amazonians and, 114
rules, 175–76
priests and, 87–88
return of, 38
rules, 174–77
totems, 97–98
use of, 26
warriors and, 81
Magical intrusion, 73
Magical security, 73–74
Mana field, 74
Management team, of Aztechnology Corporation, 60–62
Masaya cartel, 51, 52
Matrix, 37
security, 74
teocalli and, 89
Mayan civilization
culture, 32–33
language, 151
migration of, 33
tribes, 32–33
Mazatlan
harbor, 115
military base at, 76
Medellín cartel, 51–52, 61
MediCarro, 59, 162
rules, 178
Megacorporations. *See also* Aztechnology Corporation
extraction of personnel, 72
extraterritorial status of, 41, 52
growth of, 41
intercorporate relationships, 71–72
Operation RECIPROCITY and, 54
private, 59
technopiracy and, 52
Veracruz Settlement and, 41, 47
Mercenaries, 24–25, 76, 138

Mesoamerica
  drug trade, 52
  extraterritonality and, 52
Mesoamerind
  complaints of, 16
  languages, 150–51
  rebels, 16–17
  Spanish conquerors treatment of, 34
Mestizos, 111–12
  under Aztlan government, 19
  complaints of, 16–17
Metahuman brains, 66
Metal molybdenum, 52
Metamagic, 98
Metatype, 112
Mexica, 33–34
Mexican-American War, 35
Mexican army, rebel ambush of, 17
Mexico (Aztlan)
  church of, 35
  government
    Azatlán Party, 38
    caretaker, 37
    coalition, 18, 36
    collapse of, 19
  liberation of, 35
  renaming of, 38
  VITAS epidemic, 18–19
  war with United States, 35
  Yucatán civil war, 14–29
Mexico City
  burning of, 18–19
  name change, 54
  occupation of, 35
  VITAS epidemic and, 18–19
Military
  air forces, 78
  bases, 15, 76
  corporate, 76–78
  equipment, 76
  ground forces, 77
  intelligence, 78–79
  national, 76–78, 149
  naval forces, 77
  space forces, 78
  tactics, 27
  technology, 69
  use of temples, 86
  warriors, 79–81
Mindbenders, 144–45
Mind-scan, 72
Ministry of Health and Welfare, 162, 163
Missiles, 25
Missionaries, 34
Mitsuhama Computer Technologies
  Operation RECIPROCITY and, 45
  relations with Aztechnology Corporation, 71
  subsidiaries, 47
Mixtec language, 151
Monorail system, 157
Motion, Sun of, 93
Mountains, 114–15
Music, 163–64
Mystical goods/services, 69

N
NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), 17
Nahuatlan tribes, 33–34
Nahuatl, 150–51
National Action Party. *See* Partido de Acció Nacional
National Autonomous University (NAU), 171
National Democratic Front. *See* Fente Democrático Nacional
National Palace, 171
National Symphony Orchestra, 164
Native American Nations (NAN), 23
  air service, 122
  censuring by, 39
  membership in, 38–39
  refusal of aid, 40
  rivalry with, 39–40
Navy, 77
NewsFAXday, 15–16
New Society of Jesus, 34–35, 36, 96
Nexus, 37, 66
Nicaragua, 106
  drug cartels of, 51–53
  membership in Aztlan republic, 41
  technopiracy in, 52
Nightclubs, 169
Non-(meta)human sentients, 113

O
Oaxaca
  language of, 151
  military base at, 76
Obsidian-edged sword, 91, 170
Old Ways, 38
Ollamaliztli, 164–66
Olmec civilization, 32
Omega Order, 42
Omens, 93
Opera, 163
Operational Maneuver Groups, 77
Operation Big Gun, 47
Operation Libertad, 28–29
Operation RECIPROCITY, 42–47, 54
Opposition parties, 148
Organized crime, 166–67
Oriz, Diego, 52
ORO Corporation. *See also* Aztechnology Corporation
  Awakening and, 52
  Corporate Court and, 53
  drug cartels and, 52–53
  exploitation rights, 52
  image change, 54
  joint venture with Aztlan, 54
  matrix-based electoral system, 37
  name change, 54
  technopiracy and, 52–53
  VITAS epidemic and, 36, 53
  war with Keruba, 53
Ortega, Juan, 52, 61
Otontin order, of warrior, 80, 81

P
Panama, 76, 106
  drug cartels of, 36, 51–53
  government collapse, 109
  membership in Aztlan republic, 41
  technopiracy in, 52
Panama Canal, 107
  history of, 108–10
  locks, 107–8
Panama Canal Zone, 108
Pan-American Highway, 125
Pan-Corporate Security Committee, 44–47
Pan-Corporate Zone, 109
PanGlobe, 122
PANICBUTTON, 157, 162
Paramilitary force, 24
Paranatural, 74
  energy, 84
  screening process, 72
Partido de Acció Nacional (PAN), 18, 36, 94, 148
Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), 18, 36, 148
Path of the Sun, 84–85. *See also* Religion
  headquarters, 87
  worship, 88
    deity petitions, 88–90
    demon, 92–94
    sacrifices, 90–92
Patrol boats, 131, 180
Patrons, 62
Peasants, 137–38
Pemex Corporation, 19, 36, 58
Personal sacrifice, 90
Peso, 139–40
  libre, 139–40
  norma, 139–40
Physical adepts, 75
Physical security, 75, 123–24
Plan of Iguala, 35
Plumed Serpent, 97
  rules, 175
  totem, 38
Pobre (serpent), 20
  interview with, 21–27
Point Polyphemus, 29
Politics
  elections, 148–49
  opposition parties, 148
Pollution, 158, 180
Population, 111–13
Precipitation, 113–14
Prejudice, 112
Priest, 84
  magically active, 87–88
  role in deity petitions, 89
Priesthood, 86–88
Private corporation, 59
Progreso, 15–16, 27, 76
Psychological analysis, 67
Psychological warfare, 25–26
Puebla
  language of, 151
  military base at, 76
Pueblo, 23, 128–30
Pueblo Corporate Council, 106
Puerto Rico, 45
Puma
  rules, 175
  totem, 97
Pyramids, 32, 33, 59, 169–70

Q
Quachic order, of warrior, 80, 81
Quetzalcóatl (serpent), 33, 38, 85
  High Priest of, 87, 88
  rules, 175
  totem, 97, 98
  temple, 170
Quintana Roo, 16

R
Radar
  high-altitude antiballistic missile, 127
  phased-array, 15, 127
  sweeps, 131
Rain, Sun of the, 92
Rainfall, 113
Rain forest, 114
Ramos, Domingo, 64
Ramos, Julio, 52, 64
Rebellion. *See* Civil war; Uprisings
Rebels
  ambush of Mexican army, 17
  camps, 28
  cooperation of, 131–32
  Mesoamerind, 16–17
  military
    extensions, 29
    tactics of, 27
  objectives of, 22, 25
  Operation Libertad, 28–29
  supply lines, 28, 132
  support of, 22–23
Reciprocal arrangements, 123
Recruiting procedure, 72
Registry of Births, 120
Religion
  Catholic Church. *See* Catholic Church
  clergy, 87–88
  control through, 82
  deities, 84–85
  priesthood, 86–88
  state endorsement of, 82
  temples, 85–86
  worship, 88
    deity petitions, 88–90
    demon, 92–94
    sacrifices, 90–92
Remote surveillance, 21
Renraku Computer Systems
  artificial intelligence and, 66
  Operation RECIPROCITY and, 45
Resident alien status, 120
Restaurants, 168
Revered Speaker, 86
Revolutionary Council, 21
Riots, 19
Ritual
  executions, 91
  blood rites, 85
Rivers, 115
Rumors
  of artificial intelligence, 64–67
  of Atzcapotzalco (Juan), 64
  of dragon, 62
  of Jesuits, 96
  of Knight (Damien), 64
  of members of board of directors, 64–68
  of Roxborough (Thomas), 63–64
  of serpent, 59–60
  of spirits, 64–65
  wall of skulls, 25–26

S
Sacerdote, 84
Sacrifices, 90–92
Saeder-Krupp Corp., 53
  artificial intelligence and, 66
  Operation RECIPROCITY and, 45

relations with Aztechnology Corporation, 71
San Antonio, 40
San Cristóbal, 52
San Diego
access to, 125
annexation of, 40
military base at, 76
San Jacinto, 35, 39
Satellites, 79
Screaming Eagle Airways, 122
Sea insertion, of assets, 130–31
Sea transport, 107
Security
air travel, 123–24
astral, 74, 123–24
benchmarks, 74
border, 128–29, 130
corporate, 73–75
cruise ships, 130
guard, 177
land travel, 125–26
magical, 73–74
matrix, 74
penetration of, 10
personnel, 177–78
physical, 75, 123–24
temple, 90
Sensors, 129
Sentries, 73
Serpent
dragon, 62
feathered, 74
Henequen, 32
Plumed, 97, 175
Pobre, 20–27
Quetzalcóatl, 33, 38, 85
rules, 175
totem, 97, 98
temple, 170
rumors of, 59–60
worshippers, 33
feathered, 112
Shadowrunners, 138
Shamans, 38, 73, 97
border agent, 177
within clergy, 87
combat, 81
foveae and, 103
Shapeshifters, 112
Shareholders, 47, 59
Shiawase Corp., 45
Shorn Ones, 80
Simulacrum, 61
Sinkholes, 15
Slavery, 35
Snipers, 17
Soccer, 164–66
Social Security Institute, 162
Social services, 162–63
Software, technopiracy of, 52–53
Sovereign American Indian Movement (SAIM)
battles with United States, 38
support of, 38
uprising, 22
Sovereign Tribal Council (STC), 38–39
Spirits
blood, 57, 64–65, 100–2
allies, 177
conjuring limitations, 176
rules, 176
toxic, 177
control of, 57
free, 112, 113
rumors of, 64–65
watcher, 73–74
Sports, 164–66
Stock market, 141–42
Stowaways, 127
Streets, life on, 136–38
Subsidiaries, 58–59
Suburbs, 160
Sun
of Motion, 93
of the Jaguar, 92
of the Rain, 92
of the Water, 92
of the Wind, 92
Surrogate, 61, 98
Surveillance
planes, 25
remote, 21
satellites, 79
tracking device, 21
Sword
ceremonial, 175, 178
obsidian-edged, 91, 170
Symbols, 90

T
Tabasco
Olmec civilization and, 32
uprising, 17
Tampico, 115, 131
Tarascan language, 151
Technopiracy, 52–53, 166–67
Televisa, 58, 163
Temax, 16, 19
Temperature, 113
Temple, 84–86
construction of, 86
Matrix and, 89
military use of, 86
of the Moon, 33
rituals and, 85, 88
rules, 177
security, 90
of Tenochtitlán, 170
of Tezcatlipoca, 170
Tenochtitlán, 33, 34
Aeropuerto Benito Juárez, 171
Alameda Central, 171
architecture, 161–62
Aztechnology Corporation headquarters, 58, 169–70
bars, 168
by bus, 157
by car, 156–57
communications, 162
corporate sector, 159–60
emergency services, 162
entertainment, 163–64
fashion, 160–61
government of, 154, 156
hotels, 167–68
life in, effects of, 180
by monorail, 157
name change, 54
National Palace, 171
nightclubs, 169
organized crime in, 166–67
Pedegral, 171
precincts, 154
professional sports, 164–66
restaurants, 168
social services, 162–63
street scene, 158–60
suburbs of, 160
superhighways of, 156
survival guide, 158–60
teocalli of, 85
traveling in, 156–57
University City, 171
vital statistics, 154
Teocalli, 84–86, 170
Matrix and, 89
rituals, 88
security, 90
Territorial waters, 106
Terrorist attacks, 25
Terror Time, 18
Texas, 35
battle with Aztlan, 39–40
campaign, 38–39
Texas Rangers, 40, 77
Tierra caliente, 113
Tierra fna, 113
Tierra templada, 113
Tikal, 29, 32
Tithe, 90–91
Tizimín, 16, 19
Tlachtli, 164
Tlacochcalcos, 86
Tlaloc, High Priest of, 87, 88
Tolerance, decreased, 180
Toltec civilization, 33
Topography, 114–15
Torrid Zone, 113
Totems, 97–98
Traditionals, 15, 32, 138
Aztlan government and, 19
fashion, 161
uprisings of, 16–18
Travel
by air, 121–25
scheduled flights, 122–23
security levels, 123–24
unscheduled flights, 124
by land, 125
security levels, 125–26
by sea, 126
visa, 119
Trideo networks, 163
Twilight demons cults, 93–94
Tzitzimine, 64, 92, 93

U
UCAS, 39
access restrictions, 122
California campaign and, 40
Consular Operations, 11
security contracts, 56
Texas campaign and, 38–39
Underground freedom organizations, 17
Underground railroad, 28
Uniform, 16, 75
United, 122
United States
battles with SAIM, 38
Panama Canal and, 108–9
troubles of, 109
War on Drugs, 51
war with Mexico, 35
Universal Brotherhood, 72
University City, 171
Uprisings
Campeche, 17
Chiapas, 16–17
civilian militia role in, 17
SAIM, 22
Tabasco, 17
Yucatán, 16, 17

V
Valley of Mexico, 33, 34
Vegas Air, 122
Venezuela, 106
annexation of, 41
drug cartels in, 52
Veracruz Settlement, 41, 47
Vicar General, 87
Villiers, Richard, 61
Virtual gateway, 12
Vision quests, 67–68
VITAS epidemic, 18–19, 36, 53
Volcanoes, 114–15

W
Wall of skulls, 25–26
Warriors, 79–80
membership, 80–81
orders of, 81
Water, Sun of the, 92
Weapons
of AFF, 16
of civilian militia, 17
of Especial unit, 17
fines, 145
laws, 143–44
punishments, 145
Wind, Sun of the, 92
World Cup competition, 166
Worship, 88
deity petitions, 88–90
demon, 92–94
sacrifices, 90–92

X–Y
Xaltepec, Simon, 154
Xpress Communications Corporation, 15–16
Yamatetsu Corp., 45
Yucatan
asset insertion via, 131–33
civil war, 14–29
European explorers, 34
jungle of, 15
land of, 15
mestizos, 16–17
military base, 15
raids on, 19
rebels, 11
traditionals, 15, 16–17
uprising, 16, 17
Yucatec, 151

Z
Zaibatsu, 41
Zion Air, 123, 124
Zone Cathedral, 29
Zone Ghost, 28
Zone Lagos, 29

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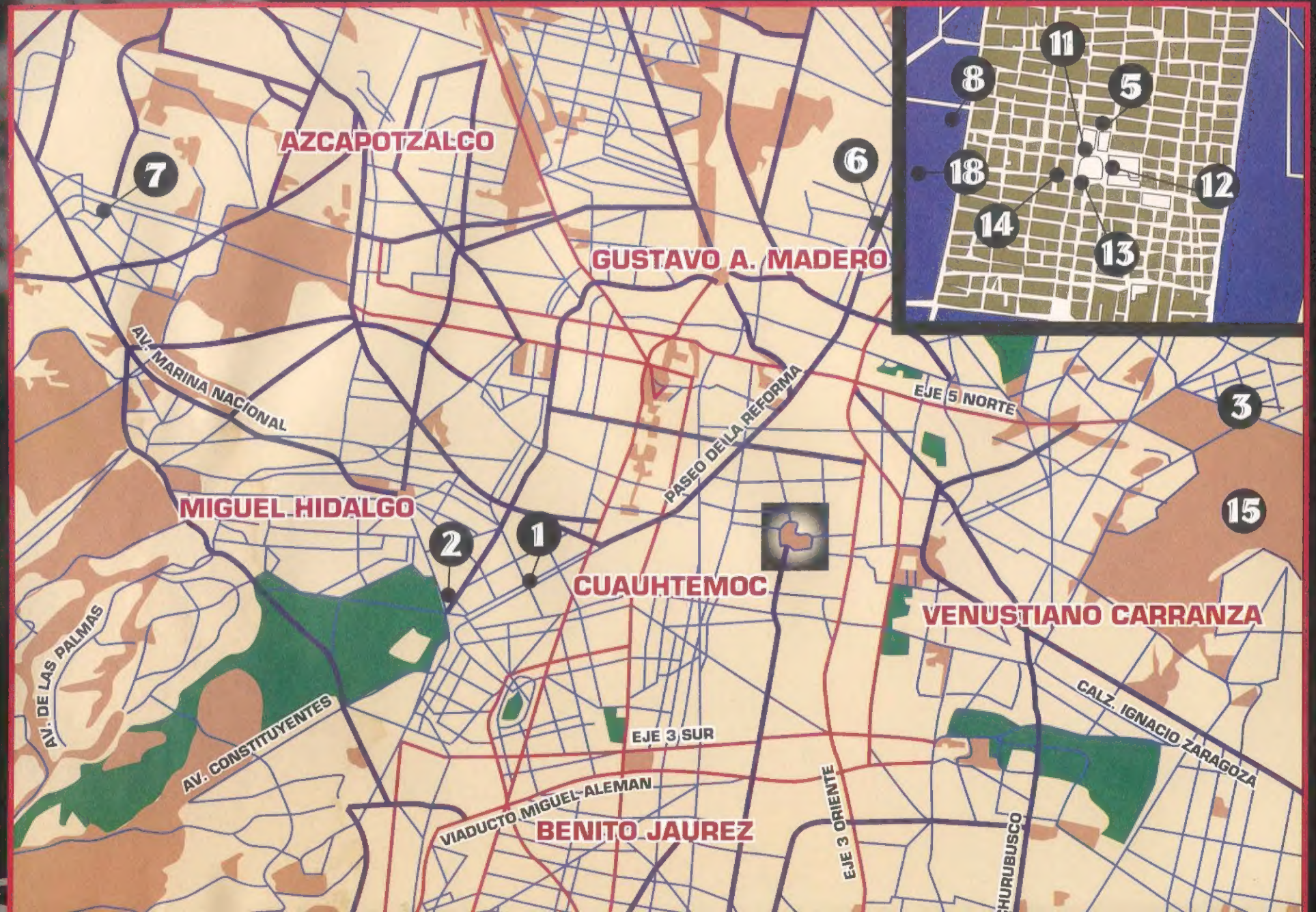

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8 OCTLI
9 ESSENSIA
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